THE MINJUNG OF MY FAMILY: THE GHOSTS THAT INFORM MY PASTORAL THEOLOGYY AND PRAXIS AS A KOREAN AMERICAN CLERGYPERSON

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Lacking in current theological education, this paper centers the ghosts (individuals and groups who died without justice) of the Korean diaspora in the United States to develop a pastoral theology and practice for the global church. The paper analyzes Korea's relationship with American empire; the LA "Riots"; and stories of the author's grandmother and father, who survived Japanese occupation, the Korean War, and the dictatorships of post-war South Korea. Interviews from five Korean American clergypersons currently working in congregational contexts provides support for the need to center the Korean diaspora experience.

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Lastly, to Choi Soo Yul, my maternal grandfather, who held me as an infant but died before I could form any memories; Lee Sun Sil, my maternal grandmother, who I remember meeting three times before passing away, not old enough to realize how precious these moments were; Hong Young Ki, my paternal grandfather, who never came back from North Korea after the Korean War to meet his son, my father; Lee Jong Yim, my paternal grandmother, who was the only grandparent I formed significant memories with despite our geopolitical distance, who suffered beyond understanding until her last breath; this project is dedicated to them. They are my ghosts who still wait for justice.

Introduction to a Korean American Liberative Pastoral Theology and Practice

"왜 알고 싶어, 스티브?...잘 사는 사람은 아무도 없었어"
"Why do you want to know that, Steve?...No one lived well back then"

- Suk Hoan Hong[1]

I open with this quote from my father because it illustrates the void American empire has violently produced within me. Born in 1983, my life would be deeply impacted by a history either forgotten to survive or purposefully hidden for United States global dominance. My father's reluctance to share is a key motivator for the writing of this paper. This work also seeks to find a pastoral care that addresses hauntings such as "no one lived well back then." This work hopes to develop a pastoral theology and practice rooted in the stories of the ghosts in my Korean American diaspora family. Also, this paper exists as a challenge and rebuke of the ways I was trained and educated to be clergy in the United States to care for someone like my father; specifically, as a pastor who identifies as Korean American. This paper is at once deeply personal and incredibly ordinary for many Korean Americans. As Jesus was grounded by a deep knowledge of the Jewish stories that make up his physical body, as preserved in the Hebrew scriptures and other holy texts, I seek a pastoral theology and practice that comes from the stories of the lives that came before my Korean American diaspora body - stories from bodies who suffered under empire violence during Japanese rule, stories from the death and destruction during the Korean War, the American empire era of the Korean Peninsula, and the lived experience of the Korean diaspora in the United States. In other words, I seek a pastoral practice centered on stories of the *minjung (민중)*, the oppressed Korean people throughout its

[1] My father's response when I try to ask him for stories when he was a child and teen between 1950-1968.

history. I hope to theorize a distinctly Korean American theology and pastoral care fundamental for all clergy as are other liberative theologies from historically oppressed people groups; this work benefits from the development of *Minjung* Theology which identifies Jesus as the first *minjung*, a member of an oppressed people group, like my father born during the Korean War and my grandmother who survived Japanese empire imperialism and died living in South Korea, which exists in the shadow of American empire to this day.

CONTEMPORARY SEMINARY TRAINING: THE PROBLEM WITH CENTERING WHITE MEN

It is important to begin by interrogating the current state of seminary education and identify the problems that have impacted my pastoral training. From 2008 to 2011, I attended Bethel Seminary located in San Diego, California, a satellite campus of their Minnesota location. I chose Bethel over nearby Westminster Seminary (Escondido, CA), because Westminster barred women from applying to their M.Div. program, justifying it as theological integrity and biblical obedience. I avoided dangerous patriarchy but still received an education steeped in white male theologians. Below I provide a brief overview of my seminary training, which is not uncommon for seminary education in the United States.

In seminary, I had to learn and reflect on the histories of white and male pastoral triumph centered in Europe and the United States. The canon works of my seminary education were written by men like Pope Gregory or Bill Hybels[2], former pastor of Willow Creek

[2] Bill Hybels was fired from his pastoral position for sexually abusive behavior with female employees: Kate Shellnutt, "Willow Creek Investigation: Allegations Against Bill Hybels Are Credible," *Christianity Today*, last modified August 17, 2022, https://www.christianitytoday.com/2019/02/willow-creek-bill-hybels-investigation-iag-report/.

Community Church[3]. At Bethel, names like the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Father Gustavo Gutierrez, Fannie Lou Hamer, the Rev. Dr. James Cones, or the Rev. Ahn Byung Mu, were not assigned or mentioned in courses required for pastoral leadership and pastoral care credits. Their works or wisdom were only mentioned during Black History Month in shallow and superficial ways. Intentionally or unintentionally, we were taught that the ultimate objective of pastoral leadership and care is unrelated to the values those important figures demanded, which were inspired by the Gospel which liberates. The training and education I received implied white males as the *subjects* of ministry (for instance, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Pope Gregory, John Livingston Nevius, successful megachurch pastors in the United States) showcased on pedestals with the Gospel bestowed upon them for their purposes; while, on the other hand, the *objects* of the work, the non-white church, the Gospel in Asia, South America, and Africa, Muslims and other pagans, taught us how to do missionary work or "outreach." Study of clergy and history of God's presence in non-white dominant nations were non-existent despite nonwhite peoples' conversion as central to the Church's success narrative. In many ways, I was taught to turn away from myself and my history. For example, I was told that I am the product of white American missionary heroes through the Nevius Method and that the first chapter of the Christian God's presence in Korea began when white men landed on its shores. It left out that to accept the gift of the missionary is to forget colonial violences and thus to decenter myself.

[3] See here for more context concerning details of the abuse of Bill Hybels: Laurie Goodstein, "He's a Superstar Pastor. She Worked for Him and Says He Groped Her Repeatedly.," *The New York Times*, August 8, 20018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/05/us/bill-hybels-willow-creek-pat-baranowski.html.

In addition, seminary courses on pastoral leadership often sounded more like business school than a pursuit of a liberative theological dream. I was taught to center an individualistic capitalistic society which favors white supremacy which is structured for the exploitation of human bodies. I learned to uphold the standards and expectations of empire for the church, which benefits from the global oppression of nonwhite peoples. Therefore, it is natural that the works of white male megachurch pastors[4] who tout religious success in capitalistic society became our teachers and models to aspire to. As a seminarian, we centered texts like "Good to Great" by Jim Collins (a business guru) and other similar publications[5] teaching us techniques found in secular business texts aiming to improve our skills as if pastoral leadership is congruent to being a CEO or a project manager in capitalistic systems. For example, here is the course description for a pastoral leadership and care course taught at Western Seminary (San Jose, CA and Portland OR), which summarizes well the problems I raise in this paper:

> PT501 – Pastoral Care and Leadership. This is a pastoral elective designed for those who intend to be effective pastors in ministry. This course will build on the leadership principles of ML502 and apply them to the local church. Specific leadership issues include self-leadership; managing systems and structures; board governance and staff development; assimilation; creating and managing budgets; innovation and ministry; measuring success; dealing with conflict; and wisdom in transitions. PT501 is also designed to cover core issues in pastoral care: weddings, funerals, visitation; care to the sick and dying; and the ministry of the sacraments. 2 credits or 2 Learning Units.[6]

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[4] Such as Bill Hybels, as mentioned, John Ortberg, Tim Keller, Andy Stanley, and others.

[5] Works which are often touted by Harvard Business School: "The Top 40 Essential Business Books to Read - HBR Store," https://store.hbr.org/best-business books/?srsltid=AfmBOoqALwdBXYSwgkJcurcuJClasHJfTvoq6RmDElX8QFWaxUIhRUUF.

[6] See: https://www.westernseminary.edu/students/online/online-course-list-and-descriptions/pastoral-ministries-courses, March 26, 2024.

The problem with pastoral care and leadership presented in this form that I see is that Jesus would have failed this course or would have disagreed with the course design. There is something inherently misguided with the course description above since it claims to be "designed for those who intend to be effective pastors in ministry" of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "Effective" leadership is embedded in the expectations of individualistic, capitalistic, white supremacy, and heteronormative norms. Ironically, in this framework, Jesus cannot not be a model of effective modern leadership if you look towards scripture: Jesus spoke in parables who blamed others for misunderstandings (Matt. 10:10-17) ; Jesus called his members, "Satan" (Mark 8:33); in the end he lost his following and his life; he led in a way that could not be sustained; after his death, Jesus' message intended for liberation and inclusive human thriving would become coopted by the religion of empire, the future savior of right-wing Christian nationalists.[7] Christian historian Justo Gonzalez writing about the "fruits" of the "success" of the expanding Christian church stated, "all told, the early story of Christianity...is not an inspiring one", concerning its period of colonial expansion into Brazil and other nonwhite places.[8] Yet, in seminary, I learned that pastoral success means this: God's ordained ministry is exclusively about geographical expansion and baptism numbers. Today, former president Donald J. Trump confidently and proudly, with approval from the vast majority of Evangelical Christians and more than half of mainliners, peddles a version of the Christian bible which includes the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, the profits

[7] John Blake, "White Christian Nationalists Are Poised to Remake America in Their Image During Trump's Second Term, Author Says," *CNN*, January 12, 2025, https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/12/us/white-christian-nationalism-du-mez-cec/index.html.
[8] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (HarperOne, 2010), 411.

previously linked to his war chest as he campaigned to become the President of the United States in 2024.[9] It is inarguable to me that according to the expectations of current courses and assigned texts of pastoral work that Jesus would be considered a failure of an "effective" leader of a parish.

REJECTION OF "EFFECTIVE" PASTORAL WORK

Yet, if you look at the theologies and histories of oppressed people groups, you see a Jesus who rejects this success-failure binary and operates without the baggage of business rhetoric like "effective," "growth," "innovation," and "management." Innovation does not define what Jesus did during his earthly ministry. Rather, Jesus' ministry was defined by entering the darkness of the tomb, sealed so no one can see inside, without breath in his lungs, waiting for Sunday to come. I think of my father's quote above here. I wonder what seminary could offer if we shed the language of organizational excellence and enter the haunted places, spaces inhabited by the histories of empire's victims such as the ghosts of my Korean American diaspora body. This paper is a wish that I could have been empowered and encouraged to listen to the ghosts of those who wait for justice in haunted places of empire history in training to be a pastor of a parish.

To fulfill my wish, I look towards the voices of those waiting for justice. This paper offers my story as a Korean American person and the ghosts from forgotten stories that haunt me for pastoral educational consideration. I ask the question, "what would a pastoral theology and leadership course look like coming from the experiences of suffering people throughout human

[9] Jill Colvin, "Donald Trump Is Selling Bibles for $59.99 as He Faces Mounting Legal Bills" *AP News*, March 26, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/trump-god-bless-usa-bible-greenwood-2713fda3efdfa297d0f024efb1ca3003.

history?" If I was assigned to reflect on the spirits of Korean Christians praying and crying for salvation from Japanese imperialism, I wonder what my pastoral practice and work would have been defined by. Rather than learn from a son of empire and privilege like Pope Gregory, my pastoral training would look different if I had, for example, learned about pastoral practice from the desires and hopes of Black slaves singing songs of sociopolitical escape from their enslavers. As I reflect on the Gospel of Jesus according to the Scriptures, if I was expected to center my paternal grandmother's experience of loss during and after the Korean War, seminary would have produced a different kind of employee for the church.

In fairness, seminary did offer opportunities for study of Christians from the margins or oppressed peoples; however, these were often electives, sidebars during lectures, or included in long lists of further suggested readings – I've noticed that other courses in various known progressive seminaries may offer a week or a day of materials. However, the marginalization or tokenized treatment of these histories is reflected in parish work. A pastor of a typical American church could avoid these histories all together without issue.[10] Speaking from my difficult experiences of attempting to bring in justice into the church's weekly life, ministry would be so simple. The Korean church in the United States is not innocent of this kind of intentional forgetting and sidelining as well. For the first 30 years of my life that I attended the Korean church as a lay member and served as pastor, not once, did I hear, or was I asked to preach about Korean American diaspora history or any sort of political issue concerning injustice towards nonwhite Americans. What would my pastoral care and leadership look like if the

[10] See: https://www.graphsaboutreligion.com/p/do-church-goers-want-to-hear-more?publication_id=1561197&utm_campaign=email-post-title&r=49ed4&utm_medium=email.

Korean American diaspora church, which had raised me and formed me, desired pastors who center their calling as clergy on speaking out for the Korean ghosts mired by unending injustice who still haunt the diaspora? These ghosts have relatives; ghosts related to the hanging bodies of lynched Black people, who still wait for justice who continue to haunt our present; ghosts like the Vietnamese and Korean women raped by American servicemen in the wars of each country who wait for the third day's resurrection; and ghosts like the children of poor Americans who cannot escape their cage of designed scarcity.

I believe pastoral training and education can be better. This paper will imagine an ethical process of becoming clergy in the United States which honors the Gospel of liberation taught by Jesus Christ and centers the ghosts of oppressed histories. It is a method that must include Korean American diaspora history, which incorporates my family's forgotten stories into pastoral training for the global church. This story I start to share in the next section and throughout this paper. These stories are embedded in the context of Korea's suffering and survival during Japanese imperialism as well as American empire's ongoing military dominance and violence in Korea. My family's stories are also intimately influenced by the history of evangelism in Korea which were partners with American dominance. This history has shaped me. Yet, it has not shaped my pastoral work nor the core of my identity as a pastoral leader. I begin to imagine a pastoral theological practice that centers their stories, and my grandparents, along with the forgotten stories of the Korean American diaspora. My family ghost stories.

A BETTER CENTER FOR PASTORAL THEOLOGICAL PRACTICE: GHOST STORIES OF MY KOREAN/KOREAN AMERICAN FAMILY

My paternal grandmother, Lee Jong Yim, died on January 24th, 2015, in a hospital bed in Seoul, South Korea, after years of decline suffering from Parkinson's Disease. My paternal grandfather, Hong Young Ki, died on December 10th, 2007, in North Korea. They would die without seeing each other since 1950, when Hong Young Ki decided to join the socialist movement during the period in between the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonialism and beginning of the Korean War. Although Hong Young Ki would marry again in North Korea and have children, my grandmother would hold on to hope that she would be reunited with her husband after the reunification of the Koreas, which many Koreans still hope for today. It wasn't until 2011 that my family discovered my paternal grandfather had passed away 4 years prior, thanks to a state sanctioned and organized family reunion opportunity for divided families at the North and South Korean border, the 38th Parallel. My grandmother, Lee Jong Yim died as a widow for 4 years in 2015 for a man who died in 2007.

Though he never met his father, every year, my father tries his best to organize our family on the dates of Lee Jong Yim's and Hong Young Ki's death despite time and geographical distance brought on by migration. Through ZOOM, my father holds up a picture of my grandparents and he asks us to pray and remember them. Although there are various names for this ritual, this is the remnants of my father's ancestral worship beginnings before converting to Christianity after marrying my mother. My father calls this ritual, gee-yearl (기일). This seems to be a generic word meaning memorial service or moment. However, this is the remnants of my paternal family's custom of ancestor memorial, called a *jesa* (제사). During these yearly gatherings, my father talks to the picture directly, his eyes looking into the eyes of his parents.

He asks that we do as well. It's more than a remembering to me; it is a conversation with the picture. However, my mother does not place the same emphasis on ensuring we hold up a picture of our maternal grandparents to remember them every year. The reason goes back to the deep Christian roots on the maternal side of my family as passed on by American missionaries; "Christians don't do that" my mother once told me. My maternal grandfather, Choi Soo Yul, became the only Christian convert among his siblings when he married my grandmother, Lee Sun Sil. My maternal grandparents would become influential leaders in their local Methodist community. My mother tells me Lee Sun Sil worked as a military chaplain during the Korean War. As part of their Christian practice, my mom claimed that they relaxed the need to perform ancestral worship common to the indigenous culture of Korea. What did my maternal grandparents hear from the church that led them to lay down certain aspects of their native Korean behaviors and culture? Was it something that was taught to them as a requirement of their baptism and discipleship of their faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as brought to them by white males? I wonder if my maternal grandparents are the victims of the elders of the previous generation who believed that Korea's conversion to Christianity would lead to modernization and wealth for the nation,[11] a movement that would erase indigenous Korean spiritual formation as evident in my mother compared to my father.

The elite class of Korea in the late nineteenth century believed the religion of the West would increase the geopolitical power of Korea. For a historically vulnerable nation surrounded by China to the north/west and Japan to the east, the elites of Korea determined that converting to the religion of Europe and the US provided power. As a nation under increasing

[11] Chai-Shin Yu, *Korea and Christianity* (Asian Humanities Press, 2004), 40.

pressure from outside lands, the future of an independent Korea was at the forefront of its relationship with Christianity. According to Professor of Korean Studies, Chai-Shin Yu, Korean elites of the Progressive Party of the Christian movement of late 19th century, "noticed that the Christian countries in the West were civilized and wealthy. For them, the aim of Christianity was to modernize and enrich the country, and to build a strong army; so it was reasonable that they fasten on Christianity as a means of realizing their hopes."[12] Yu continues that, "the early missionaries took proper notice of this and thus did not dwell on the life to come or the message of salvation. They maintained that Christianity was in fact relevant to the goals of modernization and enrichment."[13] Despite the early missionaries coming to Korea under the banner of saving souls, they would do so through sociopolitical means: "they were thus devoted to winning new converts and to reforming social customs to conform to Christian ethics...as a result, conservative fundamentalist theology worked not as a force for conservatism, but as a force for social reform and change in the nineteenth-century Korea."[14] Rather than allow Korean society to truly make the Gospel its own, historians speak of the binary of choice between maintaining native traditions of Korean society or adopt the religion of the white West:

> their approach to Confucianism was to denounce it as a form of paganism. They insisted on the abolition of the practices of ancestor worship, such as revering ancestors at the grave site on special occasions, holding memorial services on the anniversary of the ancestor's death and paying frequent homage to the ancestral tablets enshrined at home...the Protestant missionaries made no attempt to arrive at a compromise with the Confucian tradition.[15]

[12] Ibid, 41.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Chung-Shin Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea* (University of Washington Press, 2003), 51.
[15] Ibid.

Missionaries, taking advantage of the desire for change in Korean society along with their Korean allies, decided that to be Korean was not enough for the Gospel if Korea wanted to be as wealthy and powerful as the United States and Europe. To become a Christian meant rebuking Korean culture and adopting the lifestyle and behaviors the missionaries preached as the Gospel. Yet, good news, Gospel, to me, although it was not the intention of the white missionaries, unbeknownst to them, Koreans found a rebellious God - liberation embedded in the Gospel. This rebellious nature of God especially spoke to the have-nots of Korean society. The poor and working class rebuked the elite class who made their lives so difficult, empowered by the God of the west.[16] Chun Shin Park, Professor of Christian Studies, writes that to be Christian was a revolutionary act against the former way of Korean society and life.[17]

I believe that Koreans found solidarity in this liberating God which helped the Korean people survive Japanese colonization from 1905 to 1945. Hence, the liberative value of the Gospels also helped Korea sustain through the treachery of the United States. In 1882, the Joseon-United States Treaty of 1882 established a 'friendship" of mutual aid between Korea and the United States, if attacked. However, this would prove to be a lie as the United States decided to allow Japan to overtake Korea in a covert settlement known as the Taft-Katsura Agreement of 1905 for the sake of colonizing the Philippines without Japanese intrusion or objection. During the brutal decades of Japanese rule, farming and food supply grown in Korea benefitted the Japanese military machine, Koreans were forced to adopt Japanese names, forced to use the Japanese language, and forced to worship Japanese religion. The Korean soul

[16] Ibid, 120.
[17] Ibid, 121.

was systemically being erased. On March 1st, 1919, led by an interfaith group, majority consisting of Christians,[18] millions of Koreans joined in peaceful protests as a plea to the Western Christian world for help concerning Japanese colonization, but the Christian West would ignore this cry. Rather, the Empire of Japan violently suppressed protests with thousands murdered and arrested. Most American missionaries failed to walk in solidarity with their Korean Christian siblings during this time:

> The distance between the Korean Church and the missionaries had never been wider than at this time. They advised the Koreans to "cooperate with rather than resist the Governor-General (appointed by the Empire of Japan) in carrying out the reformation of the country." Although they knew that independence was the only real hope for the people of Korea, they never thought it was possible.[19]

Instead, the American missionaries prioritized their place in this new Japanese colony to maintain their power over the Korean church; the American government had advised their citizens in Korea to avoid politics.[20] Did the white male missionaries from the United States assume they could navigate around the Japanese officials to accomplish their primary mission of conversion of the Korean people? It is evident that American missionaries were less concerned with the wishes of their Korean Christian siblings and more concerned about their place in Japanese society, which they viewed as permanent. The mission and their positions of power took priority over the people. Korean people found themselves isolated as they faced the terrorism of empire. Yet, the Korean people continued to fight throughout the Japanese occupation. Despite political terrorism and global indifference they were able to retain their souls, although layered with generations of trauma. The subsequent Korean War would add on

[18] Jai-Keun Choi, *The Korean Church Under Japanese Colonialism* (Jimoondang, 2007), 69.
[19] Ibid, 92.
[20] Ibid, 87.

layers of trauma to the Korean bodies of this generation and generations after, which includes my parents to my body. These are some of the ghost stories/contexts in which a liberative pastoral theology and care can be developed.

OTHER GHOSTS OF HISTORY AS PARTNERS TO THE GOSPEL CONCERNING PASTORAL PRACTICE AND THEOLOGY

As I develop a pastoral theology and practice rooted in the stories of the ghosts in my family and in my body, I am inspired by the work of Ethnic Studies on ghosts of history that shape humanity today to assist as a model for pastoral theological reflection and praxis. Ethnic Studies gifts this work with a foundation concerning the influence of ghosts or haunted history on our present systems of reality. The second chapter of this project explores a partnership with this interdisciplinary field. For instance, I have found a mentor in the graphic memoir, "The Best We Could Do," an important resource in the field of Ethnic Studies. It is written and illustrated by Thi Bui, a Vietnamese American who migrated to the United States as a child refugee with her family. Bui wrestles with her family history by exploring the stories of her parents from birth to the present, as she reflects on her own parenting as a Vietnamese American. She hopes for generational liberation by excavating stories concerning the tragedy and triumph of her parents living through Western imperialism, political revolution, poverty, classism, white supremacy, migration, and the Vietnam War: "I understand enough of Vietnam's history now to know that the ground beneath my parent's feet had always been shifting..."[21] "Mm. You know how it was for me. And why later I wouldn't be...normal" says Bui's father after he reads through a draft of the graphic memoir, a moment which Bui included in the final

[21] Thi Bui, *The Best We Could Do: An Illustrative Memoir* (Abrams ComicArts, 2017), 326

product. The pages he read contained scenes of his traumatic past shaped by socioeconomic and geopolitical forces and the effects it had on his toxic parenting.[22] Bui's work is about the ghosts that surround her of unspoken trauma and sorrow. Unseen and unheard, but as real as the oxygen in the atmosphere. The ghosts that Bui doesn't want her son to have to navigate like she needed to during her American life: "what has worried me since having my own child was whether I would pass along some gene for sorrow or unintentionally inflict damage I could never undo. But when I look at my son now ten years old, I don't see war and loss or even Travis [the author's husband] and me. I see a new life, bound with mine quite by coincidence, and I think maybe he can be free."[23]

The ghosts are at the center of Asian American studies scholarship like *Haunting the Korea Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* by Grace M. Cho. She brings focus to her mother, who immigrated to the United States as the bride of an American GI after the Korean War. Many of these brides worked as prostitutes in Korea, shamed by American as well as Korean society.[24] Once these married couples arrived to the United States and gave birth to mixed race children, the origins of their mother's journey to the US remained mostly hidden. Yet, the traumas of war and decisions made for the sake of survival would fill the lungs of their children:

> this experience of the children of Korean War survivors—having been haunted by silences that take the form of an 'unhappy wind,' 'a hole,' or some other intangible or invisible force—reflects the notion that an unresolved trauma is unconsciously passed from one generation to the next.[25]

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[22] Ibid, 130.
[23] Ibid, 327-329.
[24] Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (U of Minnesota Press, 2008), 14.
[25] Ibid, 10.

Cho's work highlights that not only do mixed race Korean Americans find silence from their parents, but American society has completely mythologized the Korean War. The suffering and death of millions of Korean people as pawns of geopolitical warfare and power grab is buried under the guise of American morality and liberation.[26] These ghosts exist in the real bodies of the children of Korean War brides and more generally the Korean diasporic community. Cho reminds me of the numerous times I have had to process being told "my father died for people like you" by American white men. These are violent encounters. I wonder if these white men who need to mythicize their own fathers as heroes is a shame response knowing deep in their bones their fathers participated, by choice or not, in state sanctioned violence and death for the sake of political positioning and global military advantage. Perhaps these strangers demanding gratitude from Korean bodies really do believe the myth that their fathers participated in a just cause. What would it mean to pastor with a preferential option towards these ghosts? The ghosts that haunt the family of Grace Cho and the ghosts that perhaps haunt those who feel obligated to protect their father's honor as a human being?

A HAUNTED PASTORAL CARE

A sense of haunting, the unheard and unspoken things creating experiences of trauma, despair, sorrow, and anger, is not exclusive to the Asian American diaspora. Rather, being attuned to haunting voices for present and future living in hopes for justice is an organic byproduct of oppression. In "Ghostly Matters" by Avery F. Gordon, the author argues that sociological/ethnic studies research would benefit by engaging the realities of ghosts by studying the words of novelists Luisa Valenzuela and Toni Morrisons. Gordon argues that these

[26] Ibid, 50.

authors are masters of seeing the haunted legacies of the bodies left behind by patriarchy, dictatorship, and the systemic oppression against Black bodies.[27] Looking forward, Gordon urges sociologists to go to these ghostly spaces akin to the location of the promises of Revelation 21:1-4; spaces where tears need to be wiped away; spaces where there have been too much death and pain without justice; spaces where ghosts are heard and need to find peace and rest as well as those they haunt. She writes:

> "Valenzuela and Morrison are willing to go through *the other door* with its *flood of tears* and *consolation enclosed* or to collect *the footprint* and dive for the *water too and what is down there*, and thus they see that all these ghostly aspects of social life are not aberrations, but are central to modernity itself."[28]

The way Gordon talks about the relationship between hauntings of ghosts and empire reminds me of the laments of the Hebrews in Egypt toiling away as slaves in empire:

> haunting was the language and the experiential modality by which I tried to reach an understanding of the meeting of force and meaning, because haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied (as in free labor or national security)...what's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known...[29]

Similarly, Walter Brueggemann in *The Prophetic Imagination* writes about cries of God's people:

> the grieving of Israel—perhaps self-pity and surely complaint but never resignation—is the beginning of criticism. It is made clear that things are not as they should be, not as they were promised, and not as they must be and will be. Bringing hurt to public expression is an important first step in the dismantling criticism that permits a new reality, theological and social, to emerge. That cry

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[27] Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 194.
[28] Ibid, 196-197.
[29] Ibid, xvi.

> which begins history is acknowledged by Yahweh as history gathers power (Exodus 3:7-10).[30]

Lament from the dead is not a modern reflection; rather, the scriptural witness also attests to this: "remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you" (Deut. 15:15). Gordon and Brueggemann, scriptural witness, would agree that the center of history are the cries of those oppressed by empire. This is true even if God's own chosen people are the cause of the other's laments. This is why the center of God's concern according to the prophetic biblical witness seems to drift away from his chosen people to those they are oppressing (Amos 2:4-8). Christian practice and clergy leadership ought to reflect this.

Thus, Christians ought to be experts at listening to the voices that haunt and crafting an obedient life from them. We promise in our baptism or membership to hear words from the dead from dead cultures speaking in dead languages every week. If assigned in our liturgical calendars or if pastors select it for a planned sermon series, at least once a year, perhaps, Christians hear the cries of the slaves in Egypt. We also ask a *Holy Ghost* to help us illuminate our understanding of the scriptures, inspire and aid our prayers and singing, as part of liturgical practice.

Naturally, Gordon ought to find kinship with the Christian community and its practice in her hopes for the field of sociology: "haunting is a constituent element of modern social life...to study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it. This confrontation requires (or produces) a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, in our mode of

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[30] Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition (Fortress Press, 2018), location 618, Kindle Edition.

production."[31] However, Soong-Chan Rah writes this about the church's relationship to the voice of these ghosts and its expression in our worship:

> Lament in the Bible is a liturgical response to the reality of suffering and engages God in the context of pain and trouble. The hope of lament is that God would respond to human suffering that is wholeheartedly communicated through lament. Unfortunately, lament is often missing from the narrative of the American church. In Journey Through the Psalms, Denise Hopkins examines the use of lament in the major liturgical denominations in America. The study found that in the Lutheran Book of Worship, the Episcopalian Book of Common Prayer, the Catholic Lectionary for Mass, the Hymnal of the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Hymnal, "the majority of Psalms omitted from liturgical use are the laments." This trend is found not only in the mainline traditions but in less liturgical traditions as well. "In Hurting with God", Glenn Pemberton notes that lament constitutes 40 percent of all psalms, but only 13 percent of the hymnal for the Churches of Christ, 19 percent of the Presbyterian hymnal and 13 percent of the Baptist hymnal. Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) licenses local churches in the use of contemporary worship songs and tracks the songs that are most frequently sung in local churches. CCLI's list of the top one hundred worship songs in August of 2012 reveals that only five of the songs would qualify as a lament...the American church avoids lament. The power of lament is minimized and the underlying narrative of suffering that requires lament is lost. But absence doesn't make the heart grow fonder. **Absence makes the heart <u>forget</u>** *(emphasis added).* The absence of lament in the liturgy of the American church results in the loss of memory. We forget the necessity of lamenting over suffering and pain. We forget the reality of suffering and pain. In his book "Peace", Walter Brueggemann writes about this contrast between a theology of the "have-nots" versus a theology of the "haves." The "have-nots" develop a theology of suffering and survival. The "haves" develop a theology of celebration. Those who live under suffering live "their lives aware of the acute precariousness of their situation." Worship that arises out of suffering cries out for deliverance. "Their notion of themselves is that of a dependent people crying out for a vision of survival and salvation." Lament is the language of suffering.[32]

Although the community of Christians proclaim the ancient scriptures to be the center of their identity, the American church avoids proximity to the ghostly spaces, spaces waiting for

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[31] Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 7.

[32] Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (InterVarsity Press, 2015), 22-33, Kindle Edition.

liberation. The primary context for the acts of God as creator, as the son, and the spirit, within human history are these spaces.[33] However, nobody in the United States. goes to a church which centers their life on the laments of the systemically oppressed.

THE CHURCH NEEDS TO BE HAUNTED

The findings of Soong-Chan Rah are not surprising since pastors and Christian who are trained in the church, who become "disciples" of Christ, do not have the capabilities to minister from a place of death. From my experiences of pastoral leadership, care, and teaching, this has been true. The church is not a place we talk about our ghosts who are truly at the center of our present. Instead, it is a place of "positivity":

> Those who live in celebration "are concerned with questions of proper management and joyous celebration." Instead of deliverance, they seek constancy and sustainability. "The well-off do not expect their faith to begin in a cry, but rather, in a song. They do not expect or need intrusion, but they rejoice in stability [and the] durability of a world and social order that have been beneficial to them." Praise is the language of celebration. Christian communities arising from celebration do not want their lives changed, because their lives are in a good place. Tax rates should remain low. Home prices and stocks should continue to rise unabated, while interest rates should remain low to borrow more money to feed a lifestyle to which they have become accustomed.[34]

Church is a bulletin board for our success in our capitalistic world. It's a place where guilt, especially white guilt, and well-meaning action for repair is often mutated into personal pride for one's "wokeness" rather than learning to genuinely listen to ghosts and dream up reparative work and a reimagining of social reality to prevent their existence. The church is trained to be the center of self-absorption in our capitalistic and individualistic systems, which rewards

[33] Elsa Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 90.
[34] Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (InterVarsity Press, 2015), 23, Kindle Edition.

consumption and personal growth as the ultimate destination for its faith in Jesus. It really is a "take your cake and eat it too" aspirational kind of place.

This is a tension this project confronts, the death and suffering of the Gospel, the ghosts of human history, and pastoral practice. Are sources contained in certain kinds of bodies more valuable in developing a pastoral theology and practice which honors the body and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth? This paper answers, yes. This paper argues that those who have ghosts and engage with ghosts are more apt to create pastoral educational resources, sermons, and teachings than those who choose to forget them. As a Korean American, for this paper, I use myself as an example of developing pastoral theology and practice through mentorship under the ghosts that exist in my life.

As I become more aware of and analyze the injustices that consumes the atmosphere surrounding the lives of my parents and my grandparents, this paper will present a pastoral theology and practice that embodies the life of Jesus Christ and his gospel far better than the one I learned in my M.Div. seminary education. More importantly, I argue that pastoral theology and practice in church leadership must make room for a story like mine as it trains and educates future clergy in seminary. We cannot hope that seminarians will find a liberative center on their own when our society and the church is designed against it, even if some of these institutions hang a rainbow flag in the sanctuary, employ a LGBTQ+ clergyperson, or declare itself a Matthew 25[35] presbytery/church. This is a stake in the ground proclaiming that the ghosts, victims of empire, and their descendants, are more important than the successful pastors of empire, like Billy Graham, Tim Keller, or Pope Gregory, for example, who do not

[35] See: https://pcusa.org/matthew25.

remain as ghosts waiting for justice. On the contrary, the ghosts of my family are fundamental to future clergy education and development in general.

MINJUNG THEOLOGY: SHOULDERS TO STAND ON FOR KOREAN AMERICAN DIASPORA CLERGYPERSONS

Thankfully, I do not venture out alone or without shoulders to stand on. Along with Ethnic Studies, I find mentorship in the field of *Minjung* Theology. As mentioned, my grandmother was finally allowed to reunite with family members in North Korea in 2011 at a location on the 38th Parallel. It was in this space she understood that she had been a widower since 2007 to a husband who remarried and started a new family in the North; but simultaneously, my grandmother would hear from her husband who was beyond her but always around her. This kind of space for this work is found in *Minjung* Theology for me. Formally developed during the military dictatorship of South Korea after the Korean War, this theology is a fertilizing space for a liberative Korean American pastoral practice and theology. Unfortunately, its influence has waned in the Korean church since the 80s due to the dominant followership of conservative theology which is critical of *Minjung* Theology, and the rapid economic capitalistic development of Korea. However, I believe that it is still relevant for Korean American clergy, and all others by extension, who are called to shepherd the church as a force for justice and mercy to those who are oppressed by powerful systems. It gives us foundational safe space to consider our Korean body's haunted stories as Jesus did who took his Jewish heritage and transformed it into a reimagined ministry. This ministry brought radical good news to the world, especially to the poor, hungry, downtrodden, oppressed, and those mourning

(Luke 4). *Minjung* Theology gives Korean American clergy a specific theological framework from the bodies of Korean people as Jesus' Hebrew theological history did for him.

Though the origin of *Minjung* Theology is traced back to the New Testament writings, the historical movement took shape in the 60s and 70s in South Korea in the context of the dictatorship of Park Chung Hee, as the common people or *minjung* began to resist the socioeconomic systems in place. The conditions came out of President Park's politics of national development at all costs. In exchange for rapid development, the conditions for the laborer resulted in inhumanity. According to Kwon, this movement sparked when a laborer named Chun Tae Il burned himself alive in protest of the oppressive industrial conditions forced upon the working class and the poor.[36] Others suggest this movement "can be traced back to the Dong Hak Movement in which minjung protested against the western imperial forces as well as the corrupt government of Korea"[37] starting in 1894 as well as the March 1st Movement in 1919. This outpouring for a just society for the worker fueled the development of a theological community seeking to practice and live into the radical work of social reform from their faith identity. This community came alongside the *minjung*:

> in the midst of the Korean people's struggle for their just and basic rights during the 1970s, there arose a theological community which together reflected on the reality of the people, their historical condition, their experiences of suffering and struggle and their aspirations and hopes. This theological development has been named *Minjung* Theology."[38]

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[36] Oh Wang Kwon, "A Postcolonial Reflection on Minjung Theologies: Toward the Theology of Solidarity of Hybrid Minjung," 한국기독교신학논총 84 (December 2012): 170.

[37] Ki Young Hong, "A Missiological Re-evaluation of Minjung Theology in the Korean Context," 한국기독교신학논총 84 (December 2012): 264.

[38] Jae Woong Ahn, "The Wisdom of the Minjung in Korea," *Ching Feng* 38, no. 2 (June 1995): 107.

Issues such as long work hours, lack of benefits, inability to form worker unions, no minimum wage, no mandated weekly days off, and the overall powerlessness of the common people against the militaristic government and uncontrolled corporate power over its workers, led to demonstrations which were violently suppressed by the government. It was in this context some theologians and lay leaders of the church joined the struggle for freedom and justice for the *minjung*, often costing these early leaders their livelihoods in academia and the church.[39]

Minjung Theology is an apt mentor as well due to its dedication in the field with scriptural reflection. This theological movement resulted from the wrestling of Korean Christians with scripture and their current experience of social turmoil. Thus, *Minjung* Theology is referred to as an example of a contextualized theology. Although, many of its founding leaders in the church were exposed to the liberation theologies of Latin America and Black liberation Theology,[40] *Minjung* Theology is one shaped by and defined by the experience of oppression and inequality felt by the common masses of Korea in a specific historical situation:

> Theology of *Minjung* is a creation of those Christians who were forced to reflect upon their Christian discipleship in basement interrogation rooms, in trials, facing court-material tribunals, hearing the allegations of prosecutors, and in making their own final defense. They reflected on their Christian commitment in prison cells, in their letters from prison to families and friends, in their readings of books sent by friends all over the world, in their unemployment, in their stay at home under house arrest, while subject to a twenty-four-hour watch over their activities, and during visits with their friends.[41]

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[39] A. Sung Park, "Minjung Theology : A Korean Contextual Theology," *Indian Journal of Theology* 33, no. 4 (October 1984): 1.

[40] Ki Young Hong, "A Missiological Re-evaluation of Minjung Theology in the Korean Context," 한국기독교신학논총 84 (December 2012): 268.

[41] Do Woong Park, "Toward an Asian Ecclesiology Based on Asian Liberation Theology and Minjung Theology," *PhD Diss., Drew University* (PhD, Drew University, 2008), 146.

Case in point, practitioners of this theology would often prioritize common living among the *minjung* even going to lengths to live with the poor and working class and working as a factory worker.[42] *Minjung* Christians organized children's programs and provided schooling to those living in poor areas.[43] *Minjung* Theology can be defined as one shaped by the anger, cries, and poverty, of the common people.

According to Donald N. Clark, the *minjung* theological movement started alongside the awakening of other oppressed people groups around the world; we see Black Americans fighting for equal rights and access to the right to live as white Americans; we see the development of liberation theology around Latin America, and Vatican II imploring the church emphasizing its responsibility in fighting for the poor on a political level.[44] However, unlike Latin American Liberation Theology, *Minjung* Theology did not correlate or sympathize with socialist or communist ideology considering the history of war with the former USSR and North Korea. The government would often attempt smear campaigns in hopes of discouraging support for *Minjung* Theology.[45] Thus, it was important that leaders of the *minjung* movement made it clear socialist or communist ideas were not involved in its beliefs. Rather, *minjung* theologians sought to rely on the stories of the people as the foundational truths that action would grow from: "*minjung* theologians insist that the history of Korea is as sacred as the history of the biblical revelation. Thus, they identify the experience of the Korean *minjung* as a major source for their

[42] Volker Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion: Korean Minjung Theology Revisited* (BRILL, 2010), xiii.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Kenneth M. Wells, *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence* (University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 87.
[45] Ibid.

theology."[46] In its intended and purest form, *Minjung* Theology is not based on a concept or abstract philosophy. It is a theology designed by the stories on the ground. Stories of the people that are often ignored, suppressed, or unheard.

Therefore, *Minjung* Theology is a natural friend for Korean Americans who must form a life devoid of opportunities to hear their own histories. Often these unheard stories are replaced by stories of American salvation, stories of the poor Korean who needed saving. The unhearing of our ancestral stories is an all-too-common experience for Korean American diaspora members. In William Yoo's "In Teaching a History That I Never Learned", he explains,

> Across North America and Asia, Koreans, like other Asians, were simultaneously treated like a fertile harvest for white missionary conversion abroad and dirty weeds to be excised from the white-dominant republic at home. Asian women were also fetishized as alluring sexual objects. In 1920, the Missionary Review of the World, a popular Protestant magazine about U.S. world missions, published articles about the Asian "mission fields" with titles such as "The Problem of China" and "The Burden of India." The cover of one monthly issue features a young Asian child in traditional garb enacting the Macedonian call in Acts 16:9–10. With outstretched arms, the child's message is, "Come Over into Asia and Help Us." In 1891, Yun Chi-ho attended gatherings in Nashville promoting U.S. missions in Asia. Yun was invited to speak briefly after several addresses from white missionaries working in China, Korea, and Japan. He publicly expressed sincere gratitude for their ministry, but Yun privately disliked the racially and spiritually condescending undertones and overtones within some of their remarks, which depicted Koreans as hapless heathens and benighted brutes. Yun also abhorred the phrase, "Come over and help us," because it robbed Koreans and the people from the other foreign nations where the missionaries labored of their agency and presented them as inferior human beings. But Yun grew to hate the racial epithet, "Chinaman," even more than illusions to the Macedonian call. In his diary, he complained of being called a "Chinaman" throughout the southern towns and cities he visited. White women, men, and even children shouted the derogatory term to abuse, antagonize, and assail him.[47]

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[46] A. Sung Park, "Minjung Theology : A Korean Contextual Theology," *Indian Journal of Theology* 33, no. 4 (October 1984): 9.

[47] William Yoo*, "Teaching a History That I Never Learned,"* The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching 4, no. 1 (March 2023). 20.

Yoo, goes on to say, "But this is all a part of a history that I never learned. In high school, Asian Americans were not featured in my classrooms and other people of color made occasional appearances."[48] The same can be said about seminary courses in the United States. From my seminary experience, if Koreans are mentioned at all, church history of Korea is void of American brokenness and aids the message of triumph of the American church gifting Korea with the Gospel. This description of the Korean church as reported by Presbyterian L. Nelson Bell in 1957 remains accurate to how we see it today:

> No Christian can visit Korea and not be moved with a sense of deep gratitude to God for what he has done in that land. In no other field where Christian missions have had a reasonably adequate opportunity to work has there emerged a church of the strength and influence on the life of the nation as a whole comparable with that to be found in Korea. Comparisons can be unwelcome for they are not always justified. But on any given Sabbath it has been estimated that more people worship in Seoul's largest Presbyterian church than in all churches of that denomination in all of Japan. And this church is but one of over four hundred in that city, over half of which are Presbyterian. This may give a relatively true picture of the comparative impact which Christianity has made on these two nations. Presbyterianism is strong in Korea because of the combined work of American, Australian and other missions of that denomination over the years. The Methodists, Baptists and others also have much to show for their work.[49]

Nelson then goes to blame the challenges faced by the Korean church on everything besides the Christian missionaries, whose activities and presence in Korea were instrumental to the aspirations of the American military machine before and after the Korean War:

> Though white Protestant missionaries had traveled to Korea since the late 19th century, 20th century fundamentalists, unlike their predecessors, followed US military routes. White fundamentalists traveled to Korea for evangelistic and humanitarian reasons, and Koreans traveled to the US as part of post-Korean War

[48] Ibid.
[49] L. Nelson Bell, "Korean Missions: Triumph and Shadow," *Christianity Today*, April 7, 2020, https://www.christianitytoday.com/1957/02/korean-missions-triumph-and-shadow/.

> immigration. Migration across the Pacific was highly intertwined with the US military presence in Korea.[50]

The narrative surrounding the Korean church is that the US church is always the savior who graciously planted the first seeds of the Kingdom, concerned for the well-being of Koreans, and *never colluders of empire*. This is far from an accurate generalization. The church does a great disserve to itself if it leaves out layers of Christian histories/brokenness to pastoral education and theology making, which persists to affect the church today: "though called the 'forgotten war' in US history, remnants of the war remain in US evangelical intuitions, which South Korea helped to build."[51]; Korean Christian "stories were erased...Forgetful storytelling requires not only a correction to include new narratives, but also an understanding that the US evangelical empire grew by rendering Korean stories invisible."[52] Thus, not only do I aim to bring the stories of my family to the forefront for consideration to all who are considering becoming clergy of the liberative Gospel, but to also ensure that my family's stories which were erased for the sake of United States Christian empire myth making have standing against it.

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW

This paper utilizes the fields of ethnic studies, personal family stories, and liberation theologies as I develop a pastoral theology and practice as a Korean American clergyperson. Specifically, I will be guided by *Minjung* Theology as a grounding for my exploration into my familial history and other histories which define my body's specific history; Minjung Theology is the hermeneutics from the heart of people like my grandparents and my parents. I stand on

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[50] Helen Jin Kim, *Race for Revival: How Cold War South Korea Shaped the American Evangelical Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 10.
[51] Ibid, 11.
[52] Ibid, 13.

Minjung Theology's shoulders for this analysis of my story and reflection. It is a place that I've found wholeness. Before knowing the existence of *Minjung* theology, I always knew my Korean American Christian experience lacked. There was something askew in my faith experiences. I felt like a misaligned picture frame without knowing to what degree I was off-center. Minjung theology adjusted my posture so that I could breathe. As a disciple of Christ and interpreter of scripture, I felt seen and heard. The anguish of my heart supported by ancestors who shared my eyes, blood, and bones.

The first chapter will develop this partnership with *Minjung* Theology for my analysis of my family ghost stories and development of pastoral theology and practice. The next chapter explores what Korean American diaspora histories (ghosts) define the minjung of the Korean America diaspora; specifically, we dive into oral historical accounts of *Saigu* and the haunting of the Korean War on the Korean American diaspora. Chapter three, I reflect on the stories of my grandparents and my parents as teachers for the development of pastoral theology and practice. How can the ghost stories in my life lead to being a pastor who embodies the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its message of liberation for all people for all time? In chapter four, I offer the experiences of other Korean American clergypersons working today to investigate their experiences of pastoral formation trained and educated in the United States as a comparison to my clergy story.

Chapter One:

A Path Towards a Korean American Liberation Theology

BYWAYS TO CENTERING MINJUNG THEOLOGY: GUSTAVO GUITIERREZ, LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY, BLACK LIBERATION, WOMANIST THEOLOGY, QUEER THEOLOGY.

As I develop a pastoral theology and practice from the ghosts of my family, I lean on *Minjung* Theology as a framework for my work. I situate my family and *M*injung Theology within the legacy of other oppressed histories and the subsequent liberative theologies developed from. The Korean people are not the first to face sociopolitical suffering caused by greedy systems of profit or geopolitical forces beyond the control of those without power. I show that the pastoral theology and practice I explore in this work can become a partner to other theologies and practices born from suffering, hunger, and death, and longing for liberation despite social violence. Truly, thriving "against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12) also define these liberation theological histories as does Korean American history. As a matter of respect to the depth and quality of liberation theologies, I must warn readers that the following sections are not meant to be an extensive survey of each historic liberative theology. Rather, they serve as specific grounding for my argument that my Korean American familial ghost stories have the authority for consideration in pastoral practice and theological formation for all.

As a Korean American I have only survived as a pastor and Christian because of my siblings in other liberation theological movements and interpretations of the scriptures, who led me to dream beyond what I knew was possible concerning God's will for humanity. I owe a debt of gratitude to other liberative works of theology and the pastors and laypersons who came

before to proclaim that "an intimate relationship exists between the kingdom and the elimination of poverty and misery. The kingdom comes to suppress injustice."[53]

BLACK LIBERATION/BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY

In Black liberation history and theology, we meet a God who reminds bodies considered and conditioned to be slaves, without resources or political power, to know their eternal worth and rights as human beings. Despite the unimaginable odds and the violent resistance Black bodies experienced claiming their dignity, Black liberation movements continue to be a lesson for other oppressed people groups claiming their inherent rights to thriving given as gift by God. I offer the work and life of Martin Luther King Jr. and Angela Davis below for examples of lessons this work carries, which contribute to a Korean American diaspora pastoral theology and practice.

In a famous story from the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., after a threatening phone call warning him to leave town or his family would be harmed, King grappled with fear. He wrestled with whether this fight for his Black siblings was worth it. As he led civil rights action in Montgomery, Alabama, as a young father, a day before the white supremacist terrorist attack on his family home, King Jr. had to remind himself of the faith handed down to him by his father. King Sr. spoke out against injustice from a young age; King Jr.'s father who was,

> a sharecropper's son, he had met brutalities firsthand, and had begun to strike back at an early age. His family lived in a little town named Stockbridge, Georgia, about eighteen miles from Atlanta. One day, while working on the plantation, he keenly observed that the boss was cheating his father out of some hard-earned money. He revealed this to his father right in the presence of the plantation owner.[54]

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[53] James B. Nickoloff, ed., *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings* (Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1996), 27.
[54] Clayborne Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Grand Central Publishing, 2001), 4, Kindle Edition.

King Jr. considered his father a Christian, a pastor, and a civil leader who fought for the Black community and led the NAACP in Atlanta.[55] King Sr. was never afraid of white supremacy. I wonder if this God is the specific God King Jr. appealed to for his moment of trepidation in the face of systemic racial evil. It's the same God that Black Americans found dignity in as they wore their Sunday best and addressed each other as "Mr", Mrs", or "Ms." The God that gave them a space to give each other the human respect that white supremacist society refuse to give. Black Christians knew this God would hear their laments, not the god of white enslavers and racists. Falsely interpreted as harmless Christian tunes to white slave holders, Black slaves sang freedom songs knowing this God of the oppressed sang with them. Remembering that the Jewish slaves crossed the Red Sea, those songs dreamt of crossing the Mississippi River to freedom. Black Liberative Theology describes a specific God. The faith of King Sr. came from somewhere specific as well. Perhaps, as King Sr. lived and fought for justice, he also had to get on his knees to remind himself of the faith handed down to him from Black slaves, who held on to hope for liberation in the God of Exodus no matter how much evil they faced.

Another helpful analogy from Black Liberation history to my work is the way, prison abolitionist, Angela Davis, writes about Fredrick Douglass. Davis, in *Abolition: Politics, Practices, Promises*, offers Douglas as an ancestor to the abolitionist movement who missed the mark. I would argue that Douglass is undoubtedly a hero of social justice history and relevant as a guide for justice today, especially for the church today as Douglass was a Christian. Specifically, Davis argues vitally that Douglass and other slavery abolitionist leaders of his time failed to understand that the elimination of legal chattel slavery, and the promise of the Enlightenment

[55] Ibid.

were not enough for Black liberation.[56] Rather, Davis illuminates their blind spots which still plague the cause of Black Liberation today through the prison system, which is a continuation of Black enslavement. As Davis writes, Douglass said,

> it is sad to think of the multitude who only dropped out of slavery to drop into prisons and chain gangs, for the crimes for which they are punished seldom rise higher than the stealing of a pig or a pair of shoes. But it is consoling to think that the fact is not due to liberty, but to slavery, and that the evil will disappear as these people recede from the system in which they born.[57]

Douglass expresses hope in the American promise of life, liberty, and the ability to pursue happiness for the freed slave. It is a hope stemming from his commitment to and faith in the promises of the Enlightenment concerning humanity's inherent potential. However, Douglass and others failed to foresee that the Thirteenth amendment, which gave power to the state to force prisoners to perform slave labor, foundational to the legality of the practice of convict leasing, would circumvent the liberation Black people felt after the American Civil War. Prisoners continue to be treated as slaves of the state with mass approval to this day. In November 2024, voters of California failed to pass Proposition 6, which would have outlawed slave labor in prisons and provided fair wages for the labor of those in prisons. Even in a capital "B" Blue state like California, the legacy of racial mass incarceration and slavery/convict leasing continues. Davis explains that convict leasing and other legal methods of white supremacy after the Civil War "militated against any assertion of economic freedom on the part of the masses of former slaves."[58] Douglass' loyalty to the promise of legislated justice according to the realization of the enlightenment promise of the Declaration of Independence for life, liberty,

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[56] Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition: Politics, Practices, Promises, Vol. 1*, 2024, 36.
[57] Ibid, 33.
[58] Ibid, x.

and pursuit of happiness, blinded him from the truth that the law was in fact betraying his siblings through convict leasing.[59] Others were skeptical of the American promise. Davis shares that future Black liberationists like W.E.B. Du Bois and D.E. Tobias did write about the enslavement of convict leasing.[60] They were able to see through the promises of America, naming them as lies, told for the continued dominance of white Americans with wealth and power. Douglass failed to see that liberative movements need to be weary and distrustful of the "law" after the Civil War.

Thus, in addition to the God of liberation within the context of the Black American Christian experience as we saw in Marin Luther King Jr., the history of Black liberation is important in that it reveals the true character of the United States, which all theologians engaging in pastoral work must consider. In addition to the dark forces external to the Black community, such as white supremacy, which causes suffering due to its systemic violence against them, either by illegality or through legislative means, Black liberation history is also defined by failing to see the lies and tricks of the American promise inscribed in the Declaration of Independence. What Black Liberation teaches me is that America is a not land of promise, but a lie unless you are white, male, and rich, as it has been true since the beginning of its inception.

WOMANIST THEOLOGY

When womanist theologians think of God, they think of God at work in the world through the bodies and experiences of Black women's bodies. Teachings of God and God's

[59] Ibid, 46.
[60] Ibid, 51.

actions are based on the stories of ghosts whose life ended with trauma caused by patriarchy without justice. Their stories are not just remembered but are primary tools for understanding who God is and what God asks of humanity and their discipleship of Christ. Womanist teachings of God and Christianity are centered on Black female bodies that continue to manage experiences of erasure and violence in American society. The Black female body is itself the incarnational teacher of the Gospel and this status has been since the beginning of Genesis 1.[61] If you are a Black womanist seminarian, the context in which you are formed as a pastor is specific to your body. Being a Black American Christian means that you will be exposed to a certain kind of God specific to the Black woman, an experience of injustice and thriving. Just as the Rev. Dr. King Jr. knew the God of his father who empowers those in fights of justice, Black women have organic access to the God of Exodus, the liberation bringer, the lament hearing God, and the conqueror.

LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

In the development of Liberation Theology of Latin America, we find the God who led Gustavo Gutierrez to respond to the poverty in Peru, and more generally, in South America, and understanding which led to a system of theology that originates from the thirsty and hungry bodies of Gutierrez's fellow Peruvians. It is a God whose presence coincides with the elimination of poverty and oppression within a precise Latin American context in history. It is the God who ensures that every family is given the same abundant resources as others as gift to thrive during their God given life. A theology that turns the power dynamics of empire upside

[61] Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Innovations: African American, 2008), location 498, Kindle Edition.

down: the poor and oppressed shall be first and the rich, powerful, and greedy shall be last; fundamentally, God's will dictates that the poor will save the rich from their last days of their self-inflicted punishment resulting from their sin of sociopolitical and economic greed. Liberation theology thus naturally hopes to create Gospel communities "that will encompass the whole of their activity on a continent caught up in a process of liberation, and new ecclesial structures that will allow them to live a true life of faith in accordance with Latin Americans' awareness of their own specific historical destiny."[62] Latin American liberation theology thus come from specific bodies from a specific land. Thankfully, this liberative spirit of Latin American theology travels, and it is in the US that brown Spanish speaking bodies gift us with their lives through immigration and become foundations for human thriving. I see it in places like Concord, CA, whose faith based Spanish speaking populations have had to fight for tenant protections and rent control.[63] And, when they achieve victory, it benefits all those who are vulnerable to unfair and greedy rent hikes and other immoral landlord practices, as well as the souls of these landlords. From brown bodies comes relief for all bodies.

QUEER THEOLOGY

Queer theology guides this paper as well in how it centers God-created LGBTQ+ bodies, those considered outsiders by dominant forms of false Christianity found all over the world. Queer theology helps us understand that Scripture is not dead; rather, it is a dynamic collection of sacred memory from our spiritual ancestors. It is not a text that binds us imprisoned within

[62] James B. Nickoloff, ed., *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings* (Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1996), 237.
[63] Nik Altenberg, "Concord Tenants Claim Victory With Council Approval of New Renter Protections," *KQED*, February 15, 2024, https://www.kqed.org/news/11975969/concord-tenants-claim-victory-with-passage-of-new-renter-protections.

less informed and hateful behavioral limitations. Queer theology helps us interpret and analyze our present for more thriving of creation. Queer theology imagines a Christianity that expands what love is and what human thriving is while naming hate and injustice toward sexual minorities. It makes us face the bodies of transgender people or witness two men in love kissing and inspect our heteronormative norms, which are intertwined with white supremacy. The hands of queer Christians raised in worship are a protest against the violence and evil done to their bodies by the church as well as spaces of secular society.

Queer theology reminds me of the hate and courage Asian Americans have had to endure and live with. It helps me investigate the emotions and convictions I experienced while serving the Chinese Congregational Church (CCC) in San Francisco, CA, the first Asian American congressional church in the US, established in 1873. Although I wish CCC could share a brighter beginning, racism and scarcity make up the congregational soil where the Gospel was planted in Chinatown. CCC's founders were human beings with Chinese bodies rejected by white Christians whose "church" refused to baptize them and receive them as members. Their eye shape and skin were deemed unacceptable for their "Christian church." CCC resorted to planting their own church in Chinatown for Chinese people and called a reluctant white pastor to be their first.[64] For the United Church of Christ and for CCC this shameful and embarrassing history is mostly forgotten, and is literally titled "hidden histories" by the UCC.[65] On the anniversary of CCC's founding, the church celebrate this white pastor by name while the names

[64] Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Chinese Congregationalism - United Church of Christ," *United Church of Christ*, last modified March 19, 2021, https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/about/history/about-us_hidden-histories-2_chinese_congregationalism/.
[65] Ibid.

of the founders are lost. It is not surprising then that this church like many Asian American congregations struggle with LGBTQ inclusions and refuse to change for the sake of the safety of LGBTQ+ people of God, especially AAPI LGBTQ. It is hard for AAPI Christians to see themselves in the violence and rejection experienced by forerunners in the US. Truly, the struggle for LGBTQ+ inclusion in the church is the same struggle AAPI faced immigrating to this country and joining the church. The white American church hated our bodies.

AAPI DISCONNECTION TO OUR MINJUNG BODIES

AAPI need to examine our disconnect from our bodies and theology as compared to the stories of other liberation theologies. Whether in the church or in seminary education, the suffering of AAPI bodies from history is missing. This lack is why many Korean American pastors who develop a passion for justice as clergy seem to lean heavily on Black Liberation Theology as a source of knowledge, encouragement, and power (see chapter 4 for more). This is why I have tended to resonate with theologies from Latin America, other American Christians of color, women, and queer theologians, as I attempt to preach and lead for societal change for the liberation of all of God's creatures. These people groups are where I find the most kinship as a Korean American pastor, one who is aware of the violence people gifted with a Korean body like mine have experienced because of the empire of violence. It is in the voices of these historically marginalized people that I find the God who is still worthy of worship and discipleship. For so long, I concluded that my Koreanness and the Korean church were unable to give me what I needed to be the kind of pastor I wanted to be. In my upbringing in the Korean church, the sermons and teachings provided did not equip me with the theological tools and language to engage the world for the purpose of justice. Rather, they focused on achievement, marriage,

personal economic success, personal salvation, and maintaining a static Korean identity. There was no way for me to process social inequity, systemic racism, and other social ills, without consulting to other theologies which originate from other people of color and other marginalized groups: the oppressed people of Latin America, the movement led by Father Gustavo Gutierrez for liberation; the oppressed Black people of the United States; the Stonewall Uprising; the violence LGBTQ+ people face all around the world; the thriving of Black women despite the sociopolitical patriarchal forces limiting their dignity. The failure of the Korean American church and culture, an educational system in the Unites States designed to pass on white American imperialistic exceptionalism[66], the invisibility of AAPI American history and culture, all contributed to my ignorance of my own body's resources for liberative work as clergy.

Contrary to my idea of my body for most of my life, the history and ghost stories that are part of my Korean American body are fertile ground for liberative pastoral theology and practice. The erasure and avoidance we experience of our bodies in the US and Korea, which is sometimes self-inflicted, qualifies us. An example of Korean American self-thought, Steven Yeun, perhaps Korean America's most important actor, said of being Korean American, "sometimes I wonder if the Asian-American experience is what it's like when you're thinking about everyone else, but nobody else is thinking about you."[67] This othering, this denial of one's existence, reminds me of a moment in Korea when a taxi driver heard my "American-

[66] "Contradicting American Exceptionalism," n.d., https://soehs.ku.edu/news/article/study-finds-influential-textbooks-labeled-american-actions-as-imperialist-contradicting-american-exceptionalism.
[67] Jay Caspian Kang, "The Many Lives of Steven Yeun," *The New York Times*, February 3, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/03/magazine/steven-yeun.html.

accented Korean" (which often just means white accented to Koreans) and said to me, "oh, you're not from here." At the time, I thought this was just a rude *ahjushi* shaming me for my Korean speaking ability,[68] but it's far more than interpersonal awkwardness. This encounter is shaped by Cold War history in Asia, American empire, the costs of migration, social identity, and exclusion. As a young Korean American navigating my place in the world here in the US, I would often do to myself what the cab driver did to me. I erased my body's history to find inclusion in a society that doesn't even acknowledge me as American. I am reminded of the innumerous times I've been asked, "where are you from?" "San Diego" remains an inadequate answer. Yet, "Korean American" means something as exact as the stories of our Hebrew ancestors as recorded in the Old Testament. To be Korean American is to be a body that empire had touched and continues to have dominion over.

It is time that Korean Americans examine their bodies and their stories. Contained in us are precise histories and stories of our ghosts from Korea, who suffered from injustice as centers for our pastoral theology and practice, just as Jesus' Jewishness did his from the stories passed down to him. Truthfully, Korean Americans are a natural conclusion of *Minjung* Theology's progressive journey. The oppression history, the ghosts, which *Minjung* Theology addresses migrated with the diaspora. And, it is time the global church learns from us as well as we have a unique perspective beneficial for the whole church and the whole world by extension: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20). My body has

[68] Korean word for middle aged man used universally for any unfamiliar middle aged to older man.

always contained everything I needed for the work of pastoral practice for the liberation of all people, for the work of discipleship. I exist through human experiences of suffering and survival and of lives poisoned by systemic racism, capitalistic greed, empire expansion, the costs of the military industrial complex, victim and weapon of the model minority myth, men's sexual violence towards women (comfort women raped by citizens of empire, Japan and the US), and terrible biblical interpretation, which arms so many societal injustices. Korean American Christians are *minjungs*, descendants of *minjungs*, worshippers of *the Minjung,* Jesus, who can come alongside other people on the margins who demand attention and change for justice. In the next section, I argue that *Minjung* Theology is a helpful rubrical foundation for a contextual Korean American pastoral theology and practice, because *Minjung* Theology can belong to anyone with Korean genes. I argue that Korean American pastors and Christians are the next torch bearers for this important theological movement, as I claim it myself.

MY KOREAN AMERICAN MINJUNG SOUL: A LUMP IN MY SPIRIT

Before I discuss how *Minjung* Theology is a natural framework for developing a specific Korean American liberative pastoral theology and practice, it will be helpful to be aware of aspects of indigenous Korean spirituality. There are three aspects of Korean historical spirituality that are important to the making of this theology: first, the cultural concept and lived experience of *han,* and second, the role of Korean shamanism's concept of *dan.* Additionally, and third, it will be helpful to see the status of *Minjung* Theology in Korea. The church in Korea organized by the soul of *Minjung* Theology is in decline, which is important to consider.

Han

Han "is a Korean expression for unresolved deep feelings of anger, frustration and resentment of people who have become the objects of injustices upon injustices. It is the consequences of more than ten million people having been separated since the Korean peninsula was divided in 1945."[69] Before that, *han* results from decades of imperialism and attempted cultural genocide by the Empire of Japan, as well as oppression by the elite class on less privileged people before Japan's annexation of Korea. Another researcher described it as "the condensed experience of oppression that forms a kind of lump in one's spirit."[70] One could say that *han* is the key cultural identification of being Korean through which all of life is interpreted, including Scripture. It is also important to understand that the heart and soul of *Minjung* theology is the *"Han* of *Minjung*": [their] "stories contain the history of the suffering *Minjung* accuse, challenge, and lament the injustice of their society. Korean stories are filled with the *Han* of victims of starvation, wars, malignant diseases, political conflicts, tyranny, etc."[71] *Han* is like a genetically inherited scripture equivalent to the Hebrew Scriptures' recording concerning the suffering of Israel.

Shamanism and *Dan*

Shamanism, which predates Christianity in Korea, and is associated with the poor and powerless, rural class, is known to be a religion of lament or relief from *han*: [shamanism] "lends expression to sorrow and grief which cannot easily be defined or conceptualized. In another way, it is a religion of protest which grapples with the demons of life, and allows people

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[69] Byung-Mu Ahn, *Stories of Minjung Theology: The Theological Journey of Ahn Byung-Mu in His Own Words* (SBL Press, 2020).110.
[70] Ian Wright, "The Minjung and the Spirit: Holy Spirit in Korean Liberation" *St. Mark's Review* 172 (Summer 1998), 30.
[71] Andrew Sung Park, "Minjung Theology: a Korean Contextual Theology," *The Indian Journal of Theology* 33, no.4 (October 1984), 9.

to gain power and status."[72] The Korean spirituality of the common people underscores this urging to protest oppression and the ability to provide human dignity in a world that does not offer it to them. The shamanistic ritual of *kut* shows this value experienced in reality:

> "the *kut* is a counselling process which involves 'projection, catharsis, transference, consolation, admonition, release or salvation.'…Shamanism (is) the connection between the consciousness of the realm of spirit and the process of breaking free from the accumulated *han* in a person's life. This process is the cutting or resolution of *han*, and is referred to as *dan*."[73]

Dan then is the Korean concept of the end of *han*. According to Andrew S. Jung, "*dan* means to cut off the vicious circle of the Minjung's *han* by exorcising the evil spirit of revenge against the oppressive rulers from the *han*-ridden hearts of the *Minjung* (self-denial) and by transforming the *han* into the power of revolution for establishing God's nation."[74] Some call *Dan* the antidote to *han.*[75] This seems apt as I argue that a *minjung*-grounded Korean American pastoral theology and practice can be a way towards a more liberative church and world. To be Korean is to seek an antidote to *han*, as Jesus came "to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18b-19).

Brief History Concerning the Status of Minjung Theology in Korea

This movement of the *minjung* can be seen in the three generations of *minjung* theologians. According to Kuster, the first generation consisted of mostly Korean Presbyterians

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[72] Ian Wright, "The Minjung and the Spirit: Holy Spirit in Korean Liberation" *St. Mark's Review* 172 (Summer 1998), 30.
[73] Ibid, 31.
[74] Andrew Sung Park, "Minjung Theology: a Korean Contextual Theology," *The Indian Journal of Theology* 33, no.4 (1984), 11.
[75] Do Woong Park, "Toward an Asian Ecclesiology Based on Asian Liberation Theology and Minjung Theology," *PhD Diss., Drew University* (PhD, Drew University, 2008), 157.

(Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea) and Catholics on the lesser side of participation, who tended to receive seminary educations abroad in the US, Canada, and Europe.[76] Interestingly, early leaders of *Minjung* Theology learned under some of the most important figures of contextual theology: "Kim and Chung had two of the pioneers of contextual theologies as dissertation supervisors, namely Richard Shaull and James Cone respectively."[77] Considering the importance of someone like James Cone and the impact he made on Christianity in the US and the world, this "new" theology in Korea has ecumenical depth. This is encouraging to me, who seeks to incorporate *minjung* theology into his pastoral practice as an American.

However, the second generation of the 90s faced a new challenge: waning influence and smaller *minjung* congregations. *Minjung* pastors decided that for all the participation and work in community organization and protest movements, the church had sacrificed purposeful worship of the cross toward the end of the 80s.[78] So, there was a purposeful attempt to return to a more distinct religious-devotional community in their fight and work for the *minjung.* The third generation faced the challenge of rapid economic development in Korea and the increasing gap between the church and the secular: "though the first generation *minjung* theologians were ahead of the *minjung* culture movement and later used artistic resources, nowadays most of the small group of progressive theologians has lost contact with secular intellectuals and artists."[79] According to Kuster, due to globalization and the plurality of

[76] Volker Küster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion: Korean Minjung Theology Revisited* (BRILL, 2010), 132.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid,137.
[79] Ibid.

perspectives in modernity, cohesion among the *minjung* is elusive compared to the first generation.[80] There seems to be a problem of relevancy due to the ever increasingly complex and capitalistic world. However, it is exciting to think of the possibilities and creativity this invites for the future.

The challenge seems to be obvious: *minjung* churches are in decline. In 1984, Andrew S. Jung wrote, "since *Minjung* Theology is not accepted by a majority of Korean Christians, it remains a challenge for *minjung* theologians to persuade Korean Christians to *Minjung* Theology."[81] In a review of *Minjung* Theology, Myung Hyuk Kim stated that it is inappropriate to even recognize it as a Christian theology, "since it ignores the personal and transcendent God, and considers God an immanent force for historical evolution whose action is limited within the realm of historical events such as a mass revolution."[82] He goes on to call *Minjung* Theology's view of the Jewish people as the original *minjung* "twisted" and "faulty" due to its hyperfocus on identifying all biblical heroes as the socioeconomically oppressed.[83] Considering that Kim's view of proper orthodox theology is the dominant kind in most churches in Korea, with its origins in the teachings of American missionaries, the challenge for *Minjung* Theology seems to be overcoming the confusion among Christians about its scriptural foundations.[84] When Kim calls *Minjung* Theology unorthodox, he fails to mention that many conservative Christian teachings derive from Western theology as it was passed down to them from white Christians.

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[80] Ibid 138.
[81] Andrew Sung Park, "Minjung Theology: a Korean Contextual Theology," *The Indian Journal of Theology* 33, no.4 (1984), 11.
[82] Myung Hyuk Kim, "The Concept of God in Minjung Theology and Its Socio-Economic and Historical Characteristics," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 14, no. 2 (1990): 32.
[83] Ibid, 34.
[84] William Yoo, *American Missionaries, Korean Protestants, and the Changing Shape of World Christianity, 1884-1965*(Routledge, 2016), 4.

Nonetheless, *Minjung* Theology needs a home. As *Minjung* Theology wrestles with the capitalistic maturation of Korean society and the continued dominance of more conservative theology or traditional theology, perhaps the answer might lie in the Korean diaspora of the United States.

MINJUNG THEOLOGY AS GUIDE FOR A KOREAN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

As Jesus is *minjung*, who seeks salvation and liberation for all humankind, even liberation from death itself, *Minjung* Theology claims that the *minjung* of Korea are also the subjects of liberation and social reform for the betterment of the *ochlos* of Korea. Earlier in the introduction of this paper, I argued that typical pastoral practice places white male pastors from the US or Europe as the subjects of the work. Rather, *Minjung* Theology claims that the *minjung* of the Korean peninsula are the subjects of pastoral work. This tenet is one example of how intentionally contextual this theology is. The present context and the identification of Jesus as *minjung* have a symbiotic relationship in terms of understanding the praxis of the Christian faith.[85] As David Kwan-Sun Suh states, "*minjung* was our *hermeneutical key* to understanding and interpreting the Jesus event, including the Cross and Resurrection. And the Jesus in the New Testament was a reference for understanding *minjung* in the Korea of the 1970s, in making *Minjung* theology a Protestant theology of passion."[86] The *minjung*, being the subjects of history, shape history, rather than being shaped by history.[87] Clark explains that *minjung* theologians are *not* arguing that God does not determine the course of history, which has led to

[85] Volker Kuster, *A Protestant Theology of Passion: Korean Minjung Theology Revisited* (Leiden: Brills, 2010), xiii-xiv.
[86] Ibid, xiv.
[87] Kenneth M. Wells, *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence* (University of Hawaii, 1995), 91-92.

criticism and condemnation by more traditional streams of Korean theology, but rather that God makes changes in history through the *ochlos/minjung* of a particular situation and context.[88] Considering the experience of the common people of South Korea under oppressive Korean corporations and the government post-Korean War, theologians found resonance in the Gospel's use of the Greek work, *ochlos*. Depending on context, this terms can mean "crowd," "tumult," "the public," "public apart from the powerful," "mob," "culturally or politically insignificant mass," the "masses apart from the authorities," "troops," "soldiers," or "the Jewish people apart from the religious or rich ruling class."[89] *Minjung* theologians interpreted the Bible's use of *ochlos* as an intentional use of the Holy Spirit to identify the work and struggle of Jesus with the struggle of the *minjung*. Byung-mu Ahn, an early *minjung* theologian, "identifies o*chlos* with *minjung* in terms of their political, social, and religious character. *Ochlos* were the sick, sinners, tax collectors and women who were feared by the unjust and powerful ruling class."[90] It seems that early *minjung* theologians found kinship with the Jewish people who were under the violence of the Roman government and the oppressive religious systems of Jesus' contemporaries. Therefore, it makes sense that for *Minjung* Theology, the questions that demand investigation and answers are the social and political conditions of the *minjung*. In the case of the 70s and 80s in Korea, the conclusion was that the *minjung* were being oppressed by powerful corporations and a military dictatorship. Thus, action needed to be taken by the

[88] Ibid, 92.
[89] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1964), 582–590.
[90] Do Woong Park, "Toward an Asian Ecclesiology Based on Asian Liberation Theology and Minjung Theology," *PhD Diss., Drew University* (PhD, Drew University, 2008), 159

church body to organize the *minjung* to change their socioeconomic present, as Jesus did on the cross and in resurrection.

Jesus' primary ministry field was among the *ochlos* as he shared parables and teachings concerning the eschatological hope he came to share in the here and now.[91] At the same time, we see Jesus flipping tables, challenging Pharisees, denying the demands of Pontius Pilate, and feeding the hungry who are far from home. Working out of the context of *han* with the use of *ochlos* to describe the common people he ministered to, *minjung* theologians concluded that Jesus' mission and the thriving of the *ochlos* are inseparable: "Jesus, a carpenter and man of the *minjung* who was surrounded by *han*-ridden people, lived a life and died a death expressive of *dan* through which others were liberated. In the end, in the resurrection, he triumphed over death itself."[92] Jesus is a *minjung.* A *minjung* whose life led to the liberation of all humankind. To add depth to the *minjung* identification found in the Scriptures for early adopters and developers, power and comfort was found in the story of the Exodus. The story of God saving the *minjung* of Israel in their oppression under the thumb of the pharaoh was also a source of biblical support.[93] It was clear to *minjung* theologians that God has always been and always will be on the side of the oppressed.

Opportunity for Korean Americans and Minjung Theology

Jin Young Choi, professor of New Testament at Colgate Rochester Crozar, writes, "some ask if there are minjung today. It is not that minjung are absent, but the social memory of, or

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[91] Ibid.
[92] Kenneth M. Wells, *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence* (University of Hawaii, 1995), 93.
[93] Ibid.

witness to, *minjung* has waned. *Minjung* theologians argue that the role of theology is to hear the suppressed language or *han* of *minjung*."[94] Choi in her work brings in the *han* of the minjung as a companion to Black liberation theology and womanist theology. She explores the possibility that the stories of the suffering Korean people in the 70s and 80s have something of value to add in an intersectional relationship with other suffering people in the US.[95] She especially aligns the *han* with the mourning of mothers of refugees and asylum seekers in the US: "there are mothers who mourn unmourned deaths. Sara Ahmed writes, 'the containment of the bodies of others affected by this economy of fear is most violently revealed in the literal deaths of those seeking asylum in containers, deaths that remain unmourned by the very nations who embody the promise of a future for those seeking asylum.'"[96] The insights of Choi are significantly important to the future of *Minjung* Theology. Here the heart of this theology has crossed borders and contexts. Choi is practicing the best of this theology in her contextualization as a womanist Korean American theologian and Christian. Yet, because she is Korean American, this Korean theology remains connected to its foundations. Here Choi is not attempting to replace the traditions of *minjung* theology, rather she seems to be moving the theology forward for a more applicable and relevant future to serve the people who are oppressed by political and socioeconomic systems.

Thus, there seems to be a future for *Minjung* Theology through the bodies of the Korean diaspora as the movement struggles in South Korea outside of academia. As a Korean

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[94] Jin Young Choi and Mitzi J. Smith, *Minoritized Women Reading Race and Ethnicity: Intersectional Approaches to Constructed Identity and Early Christian Texts* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 44.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid, 45.

American, I am excited by the prospects of tapping into the legacy of my Korean clergy and Christian forebears of *minjung* theology. Due to the contextual nature of *Minjung* Theology, I see no issue with Korean Americans adapting its passion for seeing the liberation of the *ochlos/minjung* for their American context. We are also claiming our rightful place at the theological and church table when we take the historical dimensions of Korea's one true theology to the global church. Inherently, this theology is a hopeful one. And it is a theology that can help Korean American clergy have grounding in such a pluralistic world, which includes the diverse world of Christianity and theological perspective. A real native Korean *American* theology that takes into the consideration the ghosts of our foreparents and gives voice to their struggle for liberation from empire violence as Korean American clergypersons minister to anyone in the United States who is experiencing similar feelings to what the *minjung* call *han*.

In this chapter, I centered historical liberative theological movements as frameworks as I develop a pastoral theology and practice from the ghost stories of my family as a Korean American later in this work. The contents of this entire chapter are histories and theologies I learned outside of the seminary at the M.Div. level. Thus, I hope this chapter has also served to remind us of the ways in which my seminary education in the US has failed to center liberative theologies in the pastoral practice and theological formation of its students, as well as what the majority of the US church expects from its formally educated pastors. After the state-sanctioned murder of Michael Brown in 2016, when I pastored a church in Columbus, OH, I remember the complaints I received when I proclaimed "Black Lives Matter" from the pulpit. During my time at Youngstown Presbyterian Church in Youngstown, NY, I was told to leave the issue of the American flag in the sanctuary alone unless I sought to get fired. The leadership at

Youngstown also advised me to calm down concerning formal LGBTQ+ inclusion, though the majority of the congregation swore they were a “welcoming and inclusive space.” This church also attempted to vilify me for naming the anti-Asian racism of some of their white youth by calling me “angry.” I wonder how many pastors have had similar experiences concerning pastoral work addressing anti-Asian racism and anti-blackness. In a less dangerous but equally concerning moment, I remember asking a younger adult member who left a church I was pastoring for an evangelical mega-church curious why they decided to transfer membership. They said, “I’ll never meet someone to marry here.” The Gospel has become a dating service. Where does the disconnect come from? Perhaps it is because pastors and church members learn that liberative theology is at best a sidebar to their Christian lives. Martin Luther King Jr. is an inspirational figure who makes us feel good about ourselves, but is rarely a model for pastoral care and leadership. Fannie Lou Hamer is a nice historical footnote for the church to talk about but never its guiding light for its ministries. This paper seeks to challenge seminaries and denominations to change what is expected from a formally trained clergyperson. I argue that the forgotten stories of the Korean American diaspora and my Korean American family ghost stories have a place in the solution to this problem. In the next chapter, we explore the forgotten legacy of violence from the Korean War and the LA “Riots” and how they can inform a better pastoral theological practice for the church.

Chapter Two: The Ghosts of the Korean American Diaspora

Created By The Korean War and Saigu

In this chapter, I turn to the field of Asian American Studies and ethnic studies to better understand how American imperialism and U.S. race relations have deeply impacted the Korean American diaspora and thus the church. Here, I explore the two significant historical flashpoints in Korean American Studies, the Korean War and *Saigu*[97] to explore how our history is made invisible by mainstream historical narratives of the American Dream and the model minority myth. By putting liberative theologies in conversation with Asian American scholarship, I provide a way to hear the ghosts of my own family, constructing a theological listening practice that can be centered in seminaries and church praxis.

The field of ethnic studies develops and finds place in academia from non-white student-led protest movements, most notably, on the campuses of San Francisco State University (SFSU) and UC Berkely (UCB). As a reaction against the firing of G.M. Murray, a SFSU professor who was a member of the Black Panther Party whose classes were deemed unacceptably radical and revolutionary, two student organizations, Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation Front, mobilized and made a way for two important achievements: (1) a School of Ethnic Studies was established, and (2) SFSU agreed to admit 500 qualified non-white students for the Fall 1969 semester.[98] Across the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, on the campus of UCB, in 1969, students from several ethnic organizations, Afro-American Students Union, Third World

[97] This is a Korean word for "April 29th," the date of the beginning of the LA "Riots," often used for yearly memorial activities in remembrance.

[98] S.N. Gieg and E.C. Miller, "An Examination of Student Protest in the Late 1960's: A Case Study of San Francisco State and UC Berkeley," *Journal of the Student Personnel Association at Indiana University* 44 (2017): 87.

Liberation Front, Asian-American Political Alliance, and the Mexican-American Student Confederation, organized protests demanding that UCB make space for the creation of ethnic studies.[99] The students of color who led these protests and the faculty who supported them desired a political revolution in education to provide anti-imperialist and anti-nationalist formation.[100] This movement did not merely seek to add a couple of courses to academic programs. These were movements to make accessible education and formation centered on the suffering and thriving of the oppressed in US empire.

Thus, I hope to show that a Korean American centered pastoral theological practice will benefit from the learning of the ethnic studies movement and the resulting scholarship. It provides support to a Korean American pastoral practice that I argue for in this paper that is unavailable in US seminary education. Considering the origins of its movement, I see it as a sibling movement to the minjung movement, the same spirit of lament and liberation felt by the enslaved Hebrews written on the heart of humanity (Roman 2:15), which, as explained in the previous chapter, is the foundation of my argument for a Korean American pastoral theological practice based on the ghost stories of my Korean diaspora family. In addition, Ethnic Studies could better be in conversation with the Christian movement, considering the Gospel's heart of liberation, justice, and the pharaoh-drowning God of the Exodus, it is unfortunate that the church is often met with suspicion from a community full of *minjungs*.

In an effort to connect the Korean American body to their *minjung* identity and history, I lean on the support of works from Ethnic Studies/Asian American studies that investigate the

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[99] Ibid, 86.
[100] Colleen Lye, "US Ethnic Studies and Third Worldism, 40 Years Later," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 11, no. 2 (2010): 188.

sacrifice of Korean bodies and the manipulation of Korean land for the benefit of global American military and economic dominance. In her book, *Ends of Empire,* which is dedicated to her mother,[101] Korean American professor of Ethnic Studies, Jodi Kim argues that to be Korean American is to fight against being brainwashed by Cold War epistemologies that perpetuate heteronormative and racialized narratives pushing Korean Americans to forget the origins of our lives as Americans. In American narratives, "the Korean War gets 'translated' through the dominant Manichaean schema of the Cold War Rivalry between the superpowers."[102] For Americans, including Korean Americans, we are only offered binary stories of good vs. evil in Korea or Christian democracy vs. atheistic evil socialism. She says, "while we certainly have access to histories, told from the Korean perspective in Korean and histories told from the US perspective in English, what is rare is a narrative told from the perspective of a Korean who experienced war and migrated to the United States thereafter."[103] Kim is helpful by showing how Korean Americans succumb to and accept American narratives of benevolence that erase their own diasporic origins.

Grace Cho's work in *Haunting the Korean Diaspora* is also an important work in Ethnic Studies which addresses forgotten history. The forgetting, again which is intentionally designed by empire, leads to transmission of mistaken memory among Americans, but, specifically detrimental to Korean Americans:

> for the first generation—those who had experienced the war firsthand as children and young adults—memories of the war were still very much alive but had remained buried in silence for the duration of their lives in the United States. The second generation, however, having grown up in the United States with

[101] Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (U of Minnesota Press, 2004), introduction.
[102] Ibid, 156.
[103] Ibid., 154.

> neither their parents' storytelling nor a public discourse about the Korean War, told a collective oral history in which they felt affected by some inarticulate presence that had left its imprint on what seemed to be their normal everyday lives.[104]

Cho pulls back the curtain on the origin story of the Korean diaspora. She helps Korean Americans understand that we are not the success story of American diplomacy and savior militarism, cloaked in some great Christian mission for Korea to help save the rest of Asia. Rather, Korean Americans owe gratitude to first generation Korean Americans like Grace Cho's mother, Koonja Cho, who worked as a prostitute during the Cold War era and later married an American merchant marine. She decided what she thought was the lesser of two evils, stay in war-torn Korea as a prostitute or take a chance in the United States. These comfort women, who worked in United States sanctioned places for the sake of American military "morale," who assisted their injured Korean nation by bringing in American dollars with their bodies often through coercion, many pimped into US military ordained sex towns as minors[105], made way for my family and myself in the United States.[106] In biblical terms, Korean American Christians often like to think of our story is that of King David's Israel, or Abraham going to a foreign land with the promise of God on our backs, the great success story of South Korea, the Tiger of Asia, Samsung, Kia, Hyundai, K-pop, Korean BBQ, but the Korean diaspora story is more akin to Ruth, Rahab, and Tamar.

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[104] Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (U of Minnesota Press, 2008), 10-11, Kindle Edition.
[105] Many current travel guidebooks for South Korea list "Prostitution Street" in Itaewon, South Korea, as a considered destination.
[106] Sang-Hun Choe, "A Brutal Sex Trade Built for American Soldiers," *The New York Times*, May 2, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/02/world/asia/korea-us-comfort-women-sexual-slavery.html.

It is in Grace Cho's work that I find a framework for the concept of living into the future with the voices of ghosts who haunt us as guides. Cho utilizes Avery Gordon's work in *Ghostly Matters* to analyze her life as a Korean diaspora member:

> According to Gordon's definition, hauntings are not rare supernatural occurrences but, more often, the unexamined irregularities of everyday life. If the craft of sociology is to animate the social world, a study of ghosts is a revision of what we normally see as the social world, and a softening of its edges. Like the shadowy thing that lives in empty spaces, haunting is a phenomenon that reveals how the past is in the present.[107]

Gordon, who echoed the works of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's[108] *On the Theory of Ghosts*,[109] argues that the ghosts which haunt the present and future are particular: "the aim of telling ghost stories is to 'represent the structure of feeling that is something akin to what it feels like to be the object of a social totality vexed by the phantoms of modernity's violence.'"[110] For me, the social influence of ghosts who wait for justice, who haunt their descendants in their present to ensure that they may have peace, can be good news, like Jesus telling his disciples that as he ascends, a holy ghost will descend to help the church realize the Kingdom of God, which means liberation for all, here and now (John 16:7). It's good news because the ghosts can't rest until systems as micro as family systems or as macro as empires, which caused them to experience violence, no longer exist.[111] Thus, in addition to the Korean diaspora, I find companionship in communities like the Black South African and Japanese American World War II incarcerees whose descendants experience haunting.[112] It is not a surprise then that Japanese

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[107] Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (U of Minnesota Press, 2008), 29, Kindle Edition.
[108] Members of the Frankfurt school of academics, mostly Jewish, who fled Germany during WWII.
[109] Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame,* 29, Kindle Edition.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

Americans are some of the strongest partners and advocates for Black reparations work in California.[113] The Korean diaspora could learn from the many Japanese Americans who annually make pilgrimages around the US remembering the ghosts that still haunt our broken US empire and pledge to help other people groups who have similar experiences of haunting.

Ethnic Studies on the Korean diaspora and war are so resonant for this work. I would argue that the Korean American community and the church would rather preach silence or ignore the ghosts who whisper to us. As a Korean church person in my soul, it's been my experience that, although I was preached to and taught everything to thrive in US empire to become a capitalistic American immigrant success story, my home did not equip me to recognize and own what Grace Cho calls the "shadowy things that live in empty spaces" as a Korean American. In the next section, I examine how the Korean War continues to affect the Korean American diaspora whether they actively ignore or purposefully forget for survival and economic benefit under American empire. I then examine the ghosts of the LA "Riots" which made the forgotten Korean diaspora visible to the world. I ask what the ghosts of the LA "Riots" could teach us about liberative pastoral theology and practice.

THE GHOSTS OF KOREA POST WWII

In the post-Korean War era, Korean American clergy have historically utilized the American Dream narrative participating in the erasure of American imperialism as a core part of their ministry. My parents are prime examples of mistaken memory in their bodies concerning the role of the US in their lives. My parents have often expressed their gratitude for the US for

[113] Janie Har, "Japanese Americans Won Redress, Fight for Black Reparations | AP News," *AP News*, last modified February 24, 2023, https://apnews.com/article/japanese-americans-fight-for-black-reparations-1d50cce12fc50c76f2693a158cc08036.

providing prosperity for my brother and me, as if the US came to Korea to save Korean people and their offspring for their sake. The Korean church seems to solidify this insidious false memory. I remember having to attend memorial services at Miramar National Cemetery as a young pastor in San Diego, CA, honoring the non-Korean soldiers who were killed in the Korean War as heroes for Korean Americans. My father tried to persuade me to attend national gatherings of Korean American Christians celebrating the coming of the Mayflower, because a Korean Christian group argued that the Pilgrims were the origins of Korean Christianity and, thus, Korean salvation. However, more concerning is the lack of engagement at all with Korean American/diaspora history as Korean American religious leaders. This is also a result of US empire seeping into the Korean body, whose Christian pastoral representatives demanded that Korean Christians "stay out of politics" and prioritize saving individuals souls.[114] Koreans were given a promise of social change, for better socioeconomic conditions for the *minjung*, through "saving souls,"[115] which never came. Yet, this is the Christianity which dominates Koreans in Korea and Koreans in the United States today -- a heteronormative and racialized church envisioned by white evangelical pastors like Billy Graham and Bill Bright.

This is a scarring from erasure which continues to haunt the Korean diaspora. These scars also haunt the efforts of all people to experience justice, as Helen Jin Kim concludes, in *Race for Revival*: this work "argues that the 'forgotten war' has led to a forgotten peace. To retrieve that peace, we must call for an end to the unending Korean War, including the cessation of US empire building as well as the use of race to govern others. Otherwise, we are

[114] Helen Jin Kim, *Race for Revival: How Cold War South Korea Shaped the American Evangelical Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 149.
[115] Ibid, 136.

in a never-ending war, constantly rehearsing a past that continues to haunt, with no resolution...one race does not have monopoly on revival."[116] In this important work, Helen Jin Kim, tells a story of white American evangelicals taking advantage of the conditions of Cold War Korea by selling the stories/testimonies of Korean converts for their own social and financial benefit. The story is crafted as saving poor Koreans by bringing American democracy to Asia and saving Korean orphans to build international ministries in the name of fighting communism through Christian conversion. It was all made possible because the Cold War created a religious-economic highway between Korea and the US through the establishment of a military occupation in the aftermath of the Korean War for its own interests: "the war created and fortified a militarized highway across the Pacific Ocean. Ideas, goods, and people traveled in both directions on this militarized transpacific highway."[117] These organizations continue to bring in nearly a billion dollars today in revenue and donations (Campus Crusade for Christ now known as Cru, Billy Graham Evangelical Association, and World Vision). Equally important, her work simultaneously brings focus on how early Korean Christian leaders like Joon Gon Kim (Campus Crusade for Christ), Kyung Chik Han (founder of World Vision), and Billy Kim (translator for Billy Graham), helped their white American clergymen fight against communism. This provided them economic and social benefits of being considered a Korean Christian comrade against the spread of communism, and useful for American empire building, under the guise of evangelical activity.[118] For the white American, their faith in Jesus converted them into good and right-believing non-white people. Kim mentions that many Koreans during the Cold War

[116] Ibid, 169.
[117] Ibid, 9.
[118] Ibid, 83,118.

took advantage of being "Christian," knowing that conversion may lead to racial acceptance in Cold War US with open arms.[119] What kind of faith did the first generation of Korean diaspora pass on to the next? They gave us a politically and financially desperate one. It is my position that a liberative Gospel coming from the Korean diaspora church is nearly impossible due to a heart of self-interest and survival in empire which is a fundamental part of the development of Korean Church culture after the Korean War. This is a major unexamined reason why non-white congregations tend to be pro-life and against LGBTQ+ marriage while being more progressive concerning racism and immigration.[120] Being against a right for women to choose concerning abortion and LGBTQ+ justice seem to have nothing to do with their place in empire, while winning white Christian support.

I must say that I do not doubt my Korean parents' Christian faith. My parents, despite all the hardships and unfairness in their life, past and present day, still attend morning prayer at 5:30AM weekly (used to be daily when they were middle aged in better health), to express their trust in God. It is genuine. I doubt, however, if it is sourced from the Gospel that breaks the chains of the marginalized and oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). I think it is warped through American empire manipulation. The Jesus brought to Korea after World War II, a savior whose mission is synonymous with the agenda of the American empire, is the story which still dominates the churches of the Korean diaspora to this day. The story is stuck in my parents with the Korean diaspora church helping it have life.

[119] Ibid, 73.
[120] Ibid, 8.

We need new stories for Korean Americans, which can help the global church live into its baptism promise of liberation for our neighbors. The church, if seeking to be liberative, must counter the empire narrative with the story of how the Korean diaspora is the "'living proof' of the history of US imperialism in Asia."[121] Obviously, this is not the case even in "progressive" congregations led by "progressive" pastors as well as Korean congregations. Rather, these stories in Korea's history during Cold War United States are on the periphery, like the Canaanite woman looking for crumbs begging to be heard from and seen (Matthew 15:21-28). The demon possessed daughter being the United States suffering from its own myth making.

THE GIFT OF KOREA'S COLD WAR STORIES

The church cannot remain a place of American myth dissemination if the church wants to reflect the liberative Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we are the cause and method of dangerous American myth spread, we must acknowledge that we can change this. We can be on the frontlines of *correcting* national memory of why Koreans exist in this land in the first place. Our ancestors did not migrate here as "an escape from an unstable, economically devastated, and politically repressive homeland to safe haven in an America full of freedom and opportunity."[122] Rather, Korean Americans are here because of "US Cold War imperialism as the violent conditions of possibility for why it is that Asian Americans are here in the first place. In other words, it is to expose that, 'we are here because you were there.'"[123]

Yes, Korean American ghosts can tell us a different story. These ghosts can provide us with new stories for the church in our work to help our societies imagine a more liberative

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[121] Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (U of Minnesota Press, 2004), 12.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

existence. For instance, these ghosts would make sure to tell us that any promise the United States makes to non-white people and societies ought to be taken as a lie. The ghosts may tell us that the United States is a like a casino, the house always wins despite the promise of "loose" slots. The promises were fraudulent sources of hope many Koreans felt when they served the United States military during WWII against the Japanese. Koreans worked hard for the United States assuming that Korea would finally be free of Japan's oppression, risking their lives as secret agents in Japan empowered by the promise of American democracy and justice.[124] However, this was not to be:

> By war's end, Korea's fate would be determined, but it was not what Korean nationalists had been fighting for. Instead of Korean independence, the United States advocated a policy by which Korea would become independent in "due course." Plans for a multilateral trusteeship were in place by the end of the war, but by then Korea had become a victim to the emerging Cold War struggle between the US and Soviet Union.[125]

Korea became prime real estate to lengthen US military reach.[126] Korea had traded one empire for another.

As other people groups could in the wake of American empire making history, the ghosts of Korea could warn the world that this is just how America works, that American empire would use Korea's people and land as it sees fit for its own benefit. Reasoned by selfish American ambition, this story starts with a broken promise. In the Taft-Katsura Agreement of 1905, the US agreed to leave Japan alone as it annexed Korea, as long as Japan did not threaten the US's

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[124] Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (Simon and Schuster, 2015), 262.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid, 267.

occupation of the Philippines. This broke the Joseon-US Treaty of 1882 in which the US promised,

> There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the President of the United States and the King of Joseon and the citizens and subjects of their respective Governments. If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either Government, the other will exert their good offices on being informed of the case to bring about an amicable arrangement, thus showing their friendly feelings.

With the Taft-Katsura agreement unbeknownst to millions of Koreans, believing in the Fourteen Points of President Woodrow Wilson which promoted self-determination of all nations, they begged for help from the democratic world on March 1st 1919. Rather than the West coming to assist the Korean people under the brutal rule of Japan, the protests would be violently suppressed. The Taft-Katsura giveaway of Korea to Japan wouldn't be uncovered and shared with the world until August of 1924.[127] It wasn't until the United States needed Korea's land for its own purpose that Koreans witnessed American soldiers and weaponry on their land to "protect" it from the evil communists and promote "democracy." Depending on various estimates, two-to-four million Koreans would die compared to 36,000 American soldiers. Commonly, it is said that these 30,000 American soldiers sacrificed their lives to fight for "democracy," but, truly, two-to-four million Koreans died for the sake of United States military might for its own geopolitical interest. Millions of Koreans sacrificed while most Americans went about their lives 6,500 miles away and would benefit from this war financially and socially after the ceasefire, including American religious enterprises like the ministry of Billy Graham, as mentioned.

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[127] Council James M. Lindsay, "TWE Remembers: The Taft-Katsura Memorandum," *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 31, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/blog/twe-remembers-taft-katsura-memorandum-0.

The role American empire plays in Korean history from the beginning of the 20th century is one of geopolitical manipulation and self-serving. That is what the ghosts of the Korean War would teach us. It wasn't as simple as Truman put it, "communism was acting in Korea just as Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese had acted ten, fifteen and twenty years earlier." It would be justly appropriate for Truman to add Korea's "friend" in the United States to that list as well. The bodies of the two-to-four million people who died unjustly for the sake of US military might and wealth, their scars, Korean Americans carry with us, whether we acknowledge it or not. Again, this story of American dominance, systemically forgotten, on the formation of Korean people post-WWII is the reason the diaspora exists today. Again, American empire literally raped the bodies of Korean women as a legal activity for its soldiers.[128]

If clergy listen to the ghosts of the Korean War—those who were victims of the US domination, rape, child rape, and empire expansion—Christian nationalism, for example, could not exist. The church would become an uninhabitable space for such theologies and Christian practices as nationalism. How would any Christian of any race tolerate an American flag in the sanctuary next to a cross? How could we celebrate "Fourth of July" Sunday? We could not. The subjects of the Gospel, the *minjung*, the ghosts of the Korean story, have spoken. We are not citizens of anything else other than the kingdom/kin-dom of God as communicated to us and modeled to us through the *minjung*, Jesus of Nazareth. And, if we are led by the *minjung*, Christians would have to condemn the history of the United States and be prophetic in its critique as we preach good news of the possibility of a better society if we become disciples of

[128] Sang-Hun Choe, "A Brutal Sex Trade Built for American Soldiers," *The New York Times*, May 2, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/02/world/asia/korea-us-comfort-women-sexual-slavery.html.

Christ. Christians in America would be mandated with easy obedience to start the process of reparations for the theft and violence of the past. We would behave like Zacchaeus: “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much” (Luke 19:8b). Christians in America would obey with a smile (Luke 19:6) on our faces while we burn down all sources of American propaganda propagating how great it is. The church would bring down woes on the United States in the spirit of Amos as an act of basic discipleship (Amos 2:6-16).

THE GHOSTS OF *SAIGU* 사이구 - LOS ANGELES “RIOTS” (1992)

In the previous section, we discussed the stories of Korea post WWII, which led to the migration of Korean bodies to the United States. The Korean bodies in the United States have our own ghosts who haunt us. I present a ghost story from my life before I turn to the experience of Koreans becoming model minorities, while suffering and benefitting under a racialized capitalism. Truly, Korean stories intersect with the ghosts of Black America, which haunt the United States perpetually until Black bodies feel the experience of reparative justice from their forced homeland. I offer how these ghost stories can guide the church for liberative ministry led by the bodies of Korean diaspora clergypersons.

Growing up as a child and pre-teen in San Diego from 1993 to 1996, every few months or so, I remember driving up to Los Angeles so that my mother could pick up a large order of napa cabbage. Box after box of napa cabbage filled up my mother’s trunk and backseat. These boxes would magically turn into dozens of large jars of kimchi to raise funds for church ministry thanks to dozens of pairs of motherly Korean church hands. The Korean grocery stores in Los Angeles didn’t look like the smaller ones in San Diego at the time. As I observed when I was

younger from the backseat of the car, Korean grocery stores in Los Angeles raised up thick walls and barbed wire fencing surrounding its parking lot with armed guards overseeing all activity. Did the barbed wire and gunned security go up during the "riots"? My mother didn't seem to be bothered by it or comment on it. In my upbringing as a Korean church youth and adult, although I grew up in San Diego, CA, which is less than two hours' drive from Los Angeles, my church never reflected on or preached concerning the LA "Riots." Considering that it may have been the first time the Korean diaspora community was visible on TV screens, newspapers, and magazines, all over the world, I am still wondering today, why the silence and avoidance? Images on TV of Korean men with guns attempting to protect their small businesses displayed for the world to see, because the police, the sharp end of the American justice system, which caused the "riots," refused to protect Korean Americans concerned for their own safety and property. The Korean diaspora in Los Angeles, who owned businesses in historically Black communities, deemed unimportant for protection in contrast to whiter and wealthier neighborhoods. The Korean American community was painted as the enemy of Black Americans in the media as scapegoats for a violent US empire towards Black people. Yet, my Korean church never preached or provided theological reflection on the "riots." Rather, my church leadership opted for trips to a cemetery to honor non-Korean soldiers of the Korean War as its political engagement as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The 1992 LA "Riots" in Korean American history was never a part of my growing up or my Christian discipleship. This is a failure of the Korean American church in equipping its community, its youth, in understanding the liberative heart of the Gospels, in exchange for one that benefits white capitalistic society and honors American myth making history.

In the aftermath of the riots, other clergy and leaders have also been critical of the Korean church and its inaction. For instance, in an interview with *Sojourners Magazine*, Hyepin Im, leader of Faith and Community Empowerment, critiques the Korean church and the seminary:

> I went to seminary; no one teaches you the tools or skills that are needed to be successful in community engagement and leverage resources. If it's too late for current pastors, maybe at seminaries, we can instill a definition of ministry beyond the walls of church to engage with the broader community."[129]

Im also laments the Korean community's lack of political engagement due to lack of clergy leadership, "I wish that we could recruit some very highly respected [Korean American] pastors who can model for them [the Korean diaspora community] — and help them shift their theology — that as ministers, this is also a space that they're responsible for."[130] Im's critique is valid when you consider the sermon given to the congregation of Young Nak Presbyterian Church, a historically significant Korean American church in Los Angeles, by the Rev. Paul Yung the Sunday following the "riots": selecting Luke 10:29-37 for the sermon,

> This passage gave me hope instead of a guilty conscience. This passage gave me hope instead of frustration. Why? Because there was no choice. I had to be identified with the person who was robbed. We are the ones beaten without knowing any reason. We are just traveling along this life and we are robbed all of a sudden. We are beaten harshly. We are here helpless, and that is why this text became a passage of comfort and new strength.[131]

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[129] Betsy Shirley, "30 Years After LA Riots, Churches Must Dispel Model Minority Myth," *Sojourners*, last modified April 28, 2022, https://sojo.net/articles/30-years-after-la-riots-churches-must-dispel-model-minority-myth-hyepin-im-korean-american.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Jeffery D. Brand, "Assurances From the Pulpits: The Churches of Los Angeles Respond to the 1992 Riot," *Race, Gender & Class* 11, no. 1 (2004): 45.

Compared to a sermon given by the Rev. Dr. Cecil Murray on the same Sunday at the First Episcopal Methodist Church in Los Angeles, a Black church, whose sermon is an effective effort to help his congregation understand the role of racism and injustice at the heart of these riots, Yung's sermon centers the Korean American as the victim, the randomly injured, as the man hurt on the road needing a Samaritan, without history. Although Yung does preach about forgiving and showing mercy to those who set fires and looted stores, it fails to ask the Korean community to reflect on all the forgotten stories which led to this place of racial triangulation, which Korean Americans have benefitted from and been injured by (the scapegoats of the LA "Riots"). Conversely, Murray seems to understand more accurately the truth in the complexity: "[there is a] difference between setting a fire and starting a fire. We set some of those fires, but we didn't start any of those fires."[132] As he rightly centered the Black experience, Murray also ensured that his community reflected on the ways they may have behaved incorrectly towards other vulnerable people groups: Murray criticized "members of the community for their failure to be supportive and for allowing the violence to occur. 'It's bad enough when the Bad Shepherd mistreats the black sheep. It's even worse when the black sheep mistreat each other.'"[133] In comparison, it is a failure that Yung's sermon does not seem to contain a statement of repentance for the Korean people to say "amen" to. Again, rather, in his sermon, the Koreans are the ones in position to forgive because, "we are the ones beaten without knowing any reason." Considering that Im's

[132] Ibid, 44.
[133] Ibid, 43.

interview was published in 2022, from 1992 to the present, not much has changed concerning the Korean American church's role in liberation for all.

Thankfully, for some outside the church, the "riots" forced Koreans to reflect on their place in American society, which included the diaspora's role in benefitting from and perpetuating America's historical anti-Blackness and exploitation of Black people. There are stories of Korean Americans, much like the Chinese diaspora in the American South,[134] buying property in historically Black neighborhoods due to racially deflated real estate prices and a lack of access to whiter neighborhoods; Korean Americans took money from Black communities through these businesses to achieve the promises of the American dream to send their Korean American children to college, an aspect of the American promise which is systemically more difficult for Black populations to attain.[135] For these reasons, for many in the Black community, Koreans were like anyone else, exploiting them for their own benefit while taking away capital from the neighborhood and its people:

> but many blacks who live around those stores view the Koreans as part of a long line of outsiders who have bought up chunks of their community, exploited their dependence on local merchants and then used the profits to move on to safer areas.[136]

Black people in these neighborhoods were unable to purchase their own buildings due to historical systemic inequity, while the Korean diaspora were able to pool resources inaccessible to Black Americans (for example, family/community in the United States and Korea, loans from Korean Banks). The murder of Latasha Harlins is another story Koreans tend to want to forget.

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[134] Jonathan Tran, *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 81-84, Kindle Edition.
[135] Sandy Banks, "Korean Merchants, Black Customers--Tensions Grow," *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-04-15-me-14008-story.html.
[136] Ibid.

Harlins was a 15 year old Black girl killed in Empire Liquor in 1991, shot by owner Soon Ja Du, a 49 year old Korean woman, who served a 5 year probation with no prison time. Due to stories like these, the tension building for years between Black and Korean Americans would lead to the disaster in the LA "Riots."

There is still tension today between Korean (AAPI in general) and Black Americans. Claire Jean Kim, who wrote *Asian Americans in an Anti-Black World,* would call this Koreans finding themselves in racial triangulation, which places AAPI as below whites and perpetually foreign, but useful for shaming Black Americans: "white is best but the most important thing is not-Blackness. Better Asians than Blacks."[137] Kim explains that this is what happened to former incarcerated Japanese Americans, who, at one point represented the yellow peril to American purity and freedom, became worthy of being US Citizens, beneficiaries of Jim Crow's grip on Black Americans, who demanded release from its white designers. So, AAPI bodies became a weapon. It allowed white society to ask, "how come Asians can thrive in the US, and the Black body cannot?," while conveniently forgetting causal history. The Korean body has also become a bullet as well for the campaign against the Black body demanding systemic equity. The Korean American ghosts of Los Angeles' past and the ghost of Latasha Harlins are still relevant for the day to day. These ghosts remind the present Korean American community of their indifference, ignorance, racism, and/or greed as it benefitted from participating in the racial capitalism of the United States, which is inherently anti-Black.

For this reason, every year, on April 29th the Black and Korean community remember the tragedy of the beating of Rodney King, the injustice of the police, the failure of our justice

[137] Claire Jean Kim, *Asian Americans in an Anti-Black World* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 189.

system, and the city's abandonment of its Korean diaspora residents in Black neighborhoods. The hope is that Korean and Black communities work together to remember the events of the LA "Riots" and become allies in eradicating systemic racism. On the 30th anniversary of the "Riots" in 2022, organizers chose the theme of unity between Korean and Black residents of Los Angeles recognizing that this remains a work in progress while celebrating growth.[138] Also, organizations like Korean American Story have started projects like "Legacy Project: *Saigu* LA Riots" collecting stories from Korean Americans as oral history about their experience. Stories like Carol Kim, a second-generation Los Angeles resident, a high school senior at the time of the "riots," who became motivated to become a journalist after witnessing the racist and inaccurate reporting of a race war between Black victims of Korean people dominate news coverage of the LA "Riots."[139] Carol connects her experience as a Korean American in Los Angeles to the Muslim American community during the Muslim bans of the first Trump presidency: the United States "has not always been friendly to immigrants and people of color. To say that the [Muslim] travel ban is somehow not against Koreans is naive."[140] Another example of the stories it is collecting, Korean American Story also features a story from John Lim, who was head of the Korean American Bar Association during the "riots." He mobilized more than 80 lawyers to offer pro bono assistance to Korea American business owners in the aftermath of the "riots."[141] Rather

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[138] Claire Wang, "What Is 'Saigu'? Korean American Community Reflects on Legacy of L.A. Riots," *NBC News*, last modified April 29, 2022, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/30-years-saigu-korean-americans-reckon-ls-anniversary-riots-rcna26118.

[139] KoreanAmericanStory.org, "Carol Kim - SaIGu LA Riots - KoreanAmericanStory.org," Video, *KoreanAmericanStory.Org*, November 18, 2020, https://koreanamericanstory.org/video/legacy-project-saigu-la-riots-carol-kim/.

[140] Ibid.

[141] KoreanAmericanStory.org, "John Lim - SaIGu LA Riots - KoreanAmericanStory.org," Video, *KoreanAmericanStory.Org*, November 25, 2020, https://koreanamericanstory.org/video/legacy-project-saigu-la-riots-john-lim/.

than blame the Black community, John makes sure to highlight that the real enemy is historical injustice towards Black people in America. These are examples of how I hope this paper's argument benefits clergy education: they learn to excavate the stories of the ghosts of *minjung* like the non-white or working/poor class during the LA "Riots" and understand that Jesus stands beside them with a preferential bias, so Christians, especially clergy, must center their ministry rooted in these stories of American injustice and violence due to, in this instance, systemically designed anti-black and anti-immigrant structures of the US.

In addition to the previous chapter, I hope this second chapter also served as an exegetical ground for the rest of this paper. Whereas the previous chapter focused on the lived experience of the *minjung* of Koreans in Korea, this chapter is situated within the history of the Korean diaspora in the United States as I excavate family stories to craft a pastoral practice and theology for Korean Americans in the next chapter. I argue that to be Korean American means sharing a place of brokenness due to American empire. All Koreans including Korean Americans who are working as clergy and those who are baptized into the church cannot deny our common origins steeped in imperialism, erasure, militarism, and racism as we become disciples of Christ. Our ghosts speak as *minjung*. They are the subjects of the Gospel on Earth as Jesus was. As I present the ghost stories of my family, I must acknowledge the ghost stories of Korean American history. Jodi Kim begins her book *Ends of Empire*, a work which offers an Asian American critique of the Cold War, with a quote from Aime Cesaire which is also appropriate for this chapter:

> "Aid to the inherited countries," says Truman. "The time of the old colonialism has passed." That's also Truman. Which means that American high finance considers that the time has come to raid every colony in the world. So, dear friends, here you have to be careful. I know that some of you, disgusted with

> Europe, with all that hideous mess which you did not witness by choice, are turning – oh! in no great numbers – toward America and getting to looking upon that country as a possible liberator. "What a god-send!" you think. "The bulldozers! The massive investments in capital! The roads! The ports! "But American racism!" "So what?" "European racism in the colonies has inured us to it!" And there we are, ready to run the great Yankee risk. So, once again, be careful! American domination – the only domination from which no one recovers. I mean from which one never recovers unscarred.[142]

Korean American clergy must recognize that we are not educated or raised to be aware of the American empire origins of our scarring, which are important blemishes on our body, the same our Korean ancestors carry as well. This chapter illuminated the scars of the ancestral ghosts who support us, who connect all of us in transforming pastoral formation education and practice argued for in this paper. I share stories from the ghosts who originate from the Korean War, the LA "Riots" and the practice of *Saigu,* the anniversary day of the "riots."

This is where I now turn to the next chapter, where I consider my family ghost stories of the *minjung* in my family and find centers of being for my pastoral theology and practice. The *minjung* of my family is where I will find the Jesus of the Gospel yearning with bias.

[142] Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (U of Minnesota Press, 2004), 1.

Chapter Three:

The Ghosts of the Minjung of My Family

JESUS' GHOSTS

As we look into actual case studies of how my family's *minjung* ghost stories can guide a Korean American pastoral theology and practice, it is helpful to be reminded that Jesus acted and behaved in revelatory and radical ways from a solid foundation of his Jewish identity and culture, based in his historical sacred stories, for the benefit for all peoples and nations. In the same way, *Minjung* theology can provide this kind of depth for Korean American clergy. Jesus led out of a deep cultural identity as a Jewish person, sourced in lived experience of the Jewish people before and after the turning of the 1st century AD:

> Don't suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God's Law or the Prophets. I'm not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama (Matthew 5:17, The MESSAGE).

Korean Americans need to rethink the importance of our bodies, the stories and lives that lead to it, and our position in the church considering how important Jesus' Jewishness is to the Gospel and its application in the world for its salvation (Romans 11).

I am exploring a pastoral theological practice that challenges previously held analysis and reflection concerning the Korean American's place in the church by coercion. In the past, studies and research that are applicable for Korean American pastors (KAP) have focused on a liminal space or marginalized space: "Asian American Christians have the calling to be located at the periphery"[143]; "a significant number of Asian American scholars and writers have described

[143] Sang Hyun Lee, *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology* (Fortress Press, 2010). 180.

the Asian Americans' situation in the United States as one of 'in-between-ness' or being at the 'margin' or periphery and also of being pushed or marginalized into the space of margin or periphery."[144] Sang H. Lee in his work *From a Liminal Place* argues that KAP and other Asian American clergy should embrace this forced-upon pastoral location, and consider it a gift for ministry due to its capability to bring creative ministry to stale places or contexts that call for healing and thriving:

> ...liminality is a space where a person is freed up from the usual ways of thinking and acting and is therefore open to radically new ideas. Freed from structure, persons in liminality are also available to a genuine communion (*communitas*) with others. Liminal space is also where a person can become acutely aware of the problems of the existing structure. A person in a liminal space, therefore, often reenters social structure with alternative ideas of human relatedness and also with a desire to reform the existing social structure.[145]

Lee's work will go on to speak about the ways Jesus found himself in liminal spaces during his ministry. Sang offers an encouraging and empowering method of utilizing Asian American clergy liminality that aligns with the liminal leadership of Jesus Christ. However, there is little mention regarding the importance of Jesus' cultural theological training and influences as a human being. In Lee's framing depth is missing for the KAP. Jesus ministered out of a deep well of a specific ethnic religious narrative and theological history and claimed his body as the center, the fulfillment. Jesus may have been placed in liminality; however, he claimed authority as the center, the subject of the story.

Likewise, KAP need to claim this authority as well considering how rich the stories contained in our bodies are for the liberation of ourselves and other *minjung*. *Minjung* theology

[144] Ibid, 4.
[145] Ibid, 6.

gives us exegetical connection to these stories, which contain ghosts who will guide us in our discipleship of Jesus' mission in the world in the present. Our formation would align with Jesus, the original *minjung*, according to the tenets of *Minjung* theology; thus, as Jesus is the center, the *minjung* is the center of theology and discipleship, because Jesus is a *minjung*. Ahn Byung-Mu, who is considered the original parent of *Minjung* Theology, argues:

> Jesus was minjung in his makeup and behavior... Jesus is where the minjung are, and the minjung are where Jesus is. Although the minjung are nameless, and their function is unlike the background that plays up Jesus, the minjung come alive through the relationship. There is no record that Jesus went around to cities which had already become Hellenistic, but he went from countryside to countryside. Just as the minjung were the poor, he also had nothing. The reason that he said to his disciples when he dispatched them, "have nothing but a staff," (6:7ff.) was the exact image of his life, and it is the same with minjung's life. He did not associate with the minjung unconditionally, awaken their powers, or declare the "minjung, united!" to push them to fight. Nor did he suggest any conditions, but accepted them as sons and daughters of God. Jesus ignored the fact that they were condemned sinners. That is why it is hard to find verses that admonish them as sinners, rather it is transmitted that he chastised those who castigated the oppressed and the poor sinners. It is important for Mark that Jesus gave food and healed them. Is it not more reasonable to see these acts as the desire of the minjung or an expression of the minjung's capacities rather than Jesus' supernatural abilities? Is this not an exercise of power to move beyond self-limitation through "existence with you?" These are not individual acts of Jesus, but social acts. That is why it is possible for Jesus to say, "I cannot do miracles," when people did not believe him in his own hometown; and it is why he is able to declare, "Your faith has made you well"; and this is the reason why his powerlessness is suggested all the way to the cross without much protest.[146]

Ahn Byung-Mu provides an exegetical tool for an analysis of the ghosts of my family, the *minjung* of my family. I share stories and experiences from my family who have passed and family still living, who I suspect will transition to ghosts and die without justice, like my father. With these stories as a kind of case study, I wonder what I could have done as their pastor, and

[146] Yung Suk Kim and Jin-Ho Kim, *Reading Minjung Theology in the Twenty-First Century: Selected Writings by Ahn Byung-Mu and Modern Critical Responses* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 88.

what the church could have done in response as a way forward for general pastoral practice and theological response. In this chapter, I imagine what I would say to the ghosts and ghosts-to-be of my family, who are part of the greater context mentioned in the previous chapter on the ghosts of Korean American diaspora history.

I argue that if I am to be led pastorally by the ghosts of the minjung of my family who make up my body as a Korean American, the only response to my family's stories is exposing and addressing the injustices contained directly. Shouldn't a pastor stop traffic[147] like Jesus did? (Matthew 21:12). The church ought to expect this from me, their seminary-trained pastor, an expert in the Gospel of Christ. I present each section in a memoir narrative form, including pastoral analysis. The first story centers my paternal grandmother's use of a derogatory terms for Japanese people. The second section discusses a liberative pastoral care for my father.

"일본놈/JAPANESE BASTARDS"

My paternal grandmother, Lee Jong Yim, died cursing the Japanese who brutally oppressed the Korean people and much of Asia before the end of WWII. Growing up, although my experience spending time with her was limited, I vividly remember hearing her say 일본놈, the Korean word for "those Japanese bastards" or "those Japanese shitheads" often. This makes sense considering the detrimental impact the Empire of Japan had on her life. To this day, Japanese society and government fail to properly provide justice to the generational trauma still felt all over Asia, especially in Korea, unwilling to properly apologize for what is

[147] This refers to the protest tactic of blocking road traffic to bring attention to injustice. See here for example: https://apnews.com/article/protests-chicago-ohare-palestinian-war-traffic-30da0602309a1645a5c59e10bce83b9c

clearly truth and make reparations. She is a reminder to Japan that "'my house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers" (Luke 19:46). Japanese society needs to know that they are "bastards" and "shitheads." Until justice is done, my grandmother will continue to haunt Japanese society. No one is free to rest in peace.

However, I always felt uncomfortable with my grandmother's language. Taking courses as an undergraduate college student on systemic racism and institutional injustice based on ethnicity and nationality as an American person had formed me to be sensitive to nation-based or race-based pejorative terms and phrases. Also, personal experience of being attacked by certain words referring to my Asian name and face made me sensitive to my grandmother's language. Was my grandmother being hateful? I judged my grandmother. I know what it feels like to be called something based on my assumed ethnicity or perceived nationality (for example, "go back to China"). Does my grandmother have the right to use those words about Japanese people today? Perhaps my grandmother's use of "those Japanese bastards" or "those Japanese shitheads" had reminded me of the discomfort and anger I felt in my body when, for example, the late senator from Arizona, John McCain, would unabashedly use the word "*gook*" to refer to his Vietnamese captors during the Vietnam War. John McCain said, "I hate the *gooks*. I will hate them as long as I live" in the year 2000 without shame or caution. That word was meant to dehumanize the other in Vietnam, the enemy, so that American boys could kill with less moral injury. The issue is that John McCain used it without nuance; he didn't understand his place in the story of the empire of the United States. Senator McCain was not a victim, but another foreigner with a white face attempting to capture more capital and power through theft, cloaking it as a Judeo-Christian moral act of sacrificial benevolence, cosplaying as the

protector of the world against demonic communism.[148] Rather, my grandmother had the privilege John McCain did not. I now realize that it was just. Her use of language stems from injustice and an attack on God's kingdom. When my grandmother mutters 일본놈, it's her calling Peter "Satan" (Mark 8:33).

If my grandmother had been a member of the church in the United States, I wonder what her pastor would have said in response to her calling Japanese people "those Japanese bastards" and "those Japanese shitheads." Thinking from my own experiences of the church's response to these kinds of situations (from PCUSA pastoral colleagues and lay church members), particularly concerning the acute genocide in Palestine happening at the time of this writing, I wonder if Lee Jong Yim would have been shamed with Matthew 5:43-48:

> You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Again, speaking from experience, for example, when preaching or teaching about rebuking and fighting against presidential candidates or followers of certain political figures who campaign on policies through anti-Gospel rhetoric, I've been told, "but Pastor Steve, what about loving our enemies?" Or, when I've criticized greedy landlords[149] with the truth of their goat behavior (Matthew 25), I've been shamed and rebuked with, "What kind of a pastor are you? What

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[148] See discussion of Cold War Korea in chapter three of this paper.

[149] Bev Britton, "Concord Council to Continue Rent Protection Discussion Feb. 13," *Concord Clayton Pioneer*, last modified February 2, 2024, https://pioneerpublishers.com/concord-council-to-continue-rent-protection-discussion-feb-13/.

about loving your enemies?" The conversation usually stops there. It seems that the work to dismantle white supremacy, economic hoarding by the rich, and systemic racism, becomes feel-good time on Sundays for well-meaning people of privilege, who are proud to fly a "Black Lives Matter" flag outside their church building or a rainbow flag on their website without sacrifice. "Forgive and forget" seems to be a common way Christians have been taught to interpret the "love your enemies" teaching from Jesus. Forget the bodies that are buried in the ground; let the oppressor walk all over the graves of your ancestors, and go on, participate in the very system and way of life that caused their violent deaths. "Why bring up history?" "This is too negative." "That's the Old Testament!" These are real responses to my attempts to change institutional behavior by excavating America's empire past and the church's complicity in response to the demands of the Gospel.

When American pastors say, "love your enemies," is it liberative, or does it help to maintain the status quo of empire and human greed? From my experience, most American church teachings on loving the enemy do nothing to liberate us from sin. Rather, I argue it makes people feel socially guiltless, allowing them to return to the status quo of privilege, which tends to fill the offering basket and maintain or boost attendance. I think the common American church response, from my experience, would have made Lee Jong Yim feel shame while letting oppressors off the hook. "Lee Jong Yim, doesn't the Bible say, 'love your enemies'? Are you loving your enemies when you call them 일본놈?" This is liberation for no one, which betrays the Gospel of Jesus.

A way forward that honors the Gospel may be a pastoral response inspired by *minjung* theology, which leads to the centering of my grandmother's lived experience under the Empire

of Japan. There is story behind my grandmother's use of "those Japanese shitheads." It's the story of comfort women, the systemic rape of women's bodies to boost the morale of Japanese soldiers. It's the same state-sanctioned system of rape designed by the South Korean and United States government that existed in South Korea after the Korean War for the same reason. According to my father's cousin, my grandmother married my grandfather in part to protect herself from abduction by Japanese soldiers to be literally raped by the state. It was known and believed that married Korean women were less likely to be kidnapped, so Lee Jong Yim quickly married a willing man. Fortunately, although this marriage wasn't easy, she ended up loving her husband. The Empire of Japan would also draft young Korean men to fight in their campaigns across Asia. How many of her female and male peers did she imagine being raped or killed as a benefit to their enemy? Furthermore, it's the story of how the Empire of Japan exploited Korean farmers, seized their land, and stole rice crops to fuel their violent empire across Asia. My grandmother experienced the gaze of supremacists who looked at her as an inferior form of humanity and a sex toy. The place of pastoral concern must start here for true liberation. The pastor must flip tables before preaching to my grandmother to love her enemy.

My grandmother's use of 일본놈 teaches me this: the church ought to empower pastors to preach that my grandmother's painful use of "those Japanese bastards" is a gift to Japan to make it face its history of injustice. My grandmother's lament and anger echoes the words of Moses in Egypt, an empire which failed to heed the warnings of a God who demands justice, and who heard his people's cry (Exodus 3:7-10):

> The program of Moses is not the freeing of a little band of slaves as an escape from the empire, though that is important enough, especially if you happen to be in that little band. Rather, his work is nothing less than an assault on the

> consciousness of the empire, aimed at nothing less than the dismantling of the empire both in its social practices and in its mythic pretensions.[150]

My grandmother's words say, "Repent, Japan, of your history, for the Kingdom of God is near" (Mark 1:15).

This story of my grandmother teaches me to be convicted against a criticism I've encountered in my pastoral experience. I've been criticized when I name churches and pastors for their harmful preaching and theological perspectives. For example, in San Francisco, California, Reality SF attracts a young and large membership, intriguing visitors with their sleek worship services and website. They include welcoming language like "we are empowered to follow Jesus in three foundational ways: being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus did" and "in San Francisco as it is in heaven." However, this church teaches that people who are LGBTQ+ must remain celibate. Reality SF even employs a gay Christian who advocates for celibate life for other LGBTQ+ people as a requirement for admission into heaven. Isn't this just conversion therapy? They use flowery language to acknowledge that LGBTQ+ people deserve respect, love, and care, and they might state how terribly the church has treated its LGBTQ+ siblings in the past as many ministries and denominations do now. Nonetheless, they preach a message of hell for unrepentant, non-celibate LGBTQ people. I would say that this church is full of 호모포빅놈/"homophobic shitheads." I would say that their leaders are 호모포빅놈. My grandmother empowers to me to speak injustice without compromise. It's about saying "Black Lives Matter" without reservation. It's about preaching that the presidency

[150] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Fortress Press, 2018), 9.

of Donald Trump is antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From the pulpit to the website design, it's about sending out warnings about democratic leadership who send killing machines and weapons of mass destructions to Israel to bomb Gaza into oblivion, and about saying that the United States and all its citizens will have to repent and make material amends to the Palestinian people as the Gospel of Jesus Christ demands. Just as it was a gift of Jesus to call Peter "Satan", the church and its pastors must be empowered to call evil what it is.

However, this is not common in the way pastoral theology and practice is discussed today. As Walter Brueggemann said back in 1978, which holds true today, "the contemporary American church is so largely enculturated to the American ethos of consumerism that it has little power to believe or to act."[151] This is a problem because it sacrifices the heart of liberative theology, which is the Gospel. Martin Luther King, Jr., commenting on Jesus' teaching to love our enemies, wrote,

> there is a power in love that our world has not discovered yet. Jesus discovered it centuries ago...non-violent resistance based on the principle of love. It seems to me that this is the only way as our eyes look to the future. As we look out across the years and across the generations, let us develop and move right here. We must discover the power of love, the power, the redemptive power of love. And when we discover that we will be able to make of this old world a new world. We will be able to make men better. Love is the only way. Jesus discovered that.[152]

Unfortunately, these words by the Rev. Dr. King Jr. have been misinterpreted and neutered, leading to weaponization for right wing propaganda, often fueled by popular Christian platforms

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[151] Ibid, 1.

[152] "'Loving Your Enemies,' Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church," *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute*, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/loving-your-enemies-sermon-delivered-dexter-avenue-baptist-church#:~:text=Somebody%20must%20have%20sense%20enough,the%20personality%20of%20the%20hater.

like The Gospel Coalition, to address the political battles of our present day.[153] Clearly, Martin Luther King Jr. understood that love for our enemies meant the eradication of empire for their sake as well. The oppressed were going to have to force the oppressor to face the cost of their injustice to hopeful repentance and reparation (Exodus 21:29-32). I think about the self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc against the violence of South Vietnam and the United States:

> Just three days before his self-immolation, Beverly Deepe Keever interviewed Duc and asked him what was going through his mind and why he was doing this. Duc, a Mahayana Buddhist and somewhat radical, felt confident that his choice would ensure the Buddhists would not be overlooked in the future. He believed that by giving up his life, future generations would have the freedom to practice Buddhism free of government oppression.[154]

In other words, Thich Quang Duc hoped that his people, a vulnerable group, could be free to live like their fellow citizens who happen to be Roman Catholic, by forcing the world to see the violence of South Vietnam and of American power. He did it without violence, but, rather, an act of self-sacrifice. Likewise, Martin Luther King Jr. and his Black American siblings loved their enemies by sitting at tables, marching the streets, demanding change, and singing for God's empire-killing justice to come on earth as it is in heaven in their worship services. They put their lives in danger for the sake of their own liberation, as taught to them by the Gospel, as well as for the oppressor's liberation from their sin. Their discipleship to Jesus in protest was an act of love towards those choosing and being indifferent to societal violence.

Yet even churches of color today are struggling to act as liberators. Instead, liberation is found outside church walls. Liberation is no longer centered in the institutional church. For

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[153] Trevin Wax, "Love Your Enemies so You Can See Straight," *The Gospel Coalition*, February 29, 2024, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/love-enemies-see-straight/.
[154] "Thich Quang Duc- the Burning Monk | the Beverly Deepe Keever Collection," https://keever.unl.edu/index.php/articles/extra-vietnam-information/thich-quang-duc-the-burning-monk/.

instance, the Black Live Movement (BLM), formed after the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012 and Michael Brown in 2014, has taken the lead in loving the enemy in recent history. Movements like BLM and others like it may save the souls of citizens who depend on an immoral police state to maintain the status quo of socioeconomic privilege. They've filled the vacuum of social leadership left by the Black church, instrumental to the creation of this powerful liberative space. Recent events, like the continued killing of Black people by police from the past decade, have shown that there is a lack of *direct* congregational and pastoral leadership from the pew and in parish committee/session/council work to force our enemies to face their injustice as a form of love as preached by MLK Jr.:

> "While you may have had many Black pastors and clergy who may have shown up at (BLM) events, and you may have had a lot of people from Black churches who were at these marches and protests, from 2014 to the present, by and large, this has not been a theological movement," said Watson Jones III, the Senior Pastor of Compassion Baptist Church in Chicago. "It hasn't been a movement that has started in the basements of churches, in prayer meetings, and altars that flooded out into the streets." ...'Much of how they do what they do are examples of things that early clergy and faithful Christians did in the '50s, '60s, and even '70s, but there is an absence of clergy *leading* this movement....[155]

Rather than the works of pastors of congregation and congregations originating movement, Watson Jones III, senior pastor of Compassion Baptist Church in Chicago, in an interview with *Christianity Today* continues to say that *young activists are leading the pastor* and are finding musical partnerships with artists like Kendrick Lamar rather than church hymns and spirituals, as was common practice during the civil rights movements of the 50s and 60s.[156] I would ask the

[155] Morgan Lee, "Where the Black Church Is in the Black Lives Matter Movement," *Christianity Today*, February 19, 2021, https://www.christianitytoday.com/podcasts/quick-to-listen/black-church-black-lives-matter-police-brutality/.
[156] Ibid.

question of why churches and pastors are no longer organic allies to many justice movements today. In states like California, faith-based organizations like PICO try to fill in the gaps by helping congregations mobilize members for political action which honors the liberative Gospel, but shouldn't it work the other way around? I argue this is the case, because it is the way pastors have been trained and educated combined with the expectations of the congregation of their pastor who they pay. The American church does not in actuality want their pastor to lead in ways that Martin Luther King Jr. did, even in the most "progressive" spaces. As mentioned, I conclude this because of the criticism I've received for naming pastors and churches, and because of the countless café conversations I've had with colleagues concerning the stress and anxiety they experience if they reject "being political in the pulpit," for example. To offer data from my lived experience, in the Presbytery of San Francisco, often assumed to be the most progressive presbytery in the PCUSA, after finding out that a pastor we were sending to represent us at PCUSA General Assembly 2024 is homophobic, I decided to bring this to the attention of the executives with proof. Although the Presbytery of San Francisco claims a heart of justice and safety for LGBTQ+ people, nothing was done, and this mistake swept under the rug. Instead, my reputation suffered, and I was labeled as "argumentative" because of my work to remind the presbytery leadership of the issue for months. Conversely, the homophobic pastor was celebrated for his participation and willingness to go to GA. As I center my grandmother's *minjung* life as a guide for pastoral leadership and church ministry, how could I remain silent? This instance isn't the first time I have suffered professionally for prioritizing the *minjung* of society. I remember in Columbus, OH, when parents would send long emails criticizing my sermons to the youth, as I talked about the immorality of America's gun culture

and the Gospel. At a different church, a reconciling ministries United Methodist Church, older white members would offer me long and ignorant rebuttals to sermons addressing white supremacy, which led to loss of membership for an already anxious medium-sized church. I have more I could offer here. But if I dug up all the stories of pastors who suffered professionally and personally in trying to lead in social justice, and "if every one of them were written down," then "I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

"I'M NOT A COMMUNIST"

My father has been trying to survive his whole life in the face of political danger and violence. Suk Hoan Hong was born less than a month before the beginning of the Korean War on June 3rd, 1950. By then, my paternal grandfather had chosen to fight for the communist movement, believing in his bones that it was best for the Korean people. In *The Best We Could Do,* Thi Bui explains that after the empire of Japan surrendered in WWII, foreign soldiers left Vietnam, opening up new possibilities for its people,

> 1945 could have been the moment for a union of Vietnamese leaders from the North, Center, and South to create a self-determining democracy. Had they succeeded the next thirty years of war might have been avoided, millions of lives spared. My life, who knows how different? But the French came back, "we have come to reclaim our inheritance." Was it hubris? After being occupied by Germany, was it a way to repair their injured identity?[157]

As told by my father's cousin, as it was the hope of the Vietnamese people, before France attempted to steal again what they stole generations ago in Vietnam, my grandfather was one of many young Korean men born again with a chance to dictate for the first time in decades a

[157] Thi Bui, *The Best We Could Do* (Abrams ComicArts, 2017), 118.

Korea by Koreans after the fall of Japan. Unfortunately, Korea would not be left alone. This vulnerable peninsula full of natural resources in the north and desirable military real estate in the south would become a set of assets to protect for China, the Soviet Union, and the West.

My father as a child needed a pastor who protected him and his family from the threat of political persecution. As told to me by a cousin of my father, due to my grandfather's (Hong Young Ki) work with the socialist movement, my grandmother, my uncle, my aunt, and my father lived under state suspicion during his childhood. Added to this anxiety, my grandfather's family blamed my grandmother for radicalizing him towards socialism. My grandmother's brothers, who were strong followers of the socialist dream for Korea, seem to have been a strong influence on Hong Young Ki. South Korea was a dangerous place for people and families with socialist ties. As Robinson writes,

> (Syngman) Rhee consolidated his control (over South Korea) by ruthlessly extending wartime emergency measures into the postwar era.... Rhee could arrest almost anyone by calling them Communists or persons or organizations whose activities were 'deleterious of public order. The president (Rhee) could also declare a state of emergency, which allowed the executive to rule by fiat...few dared oppose this powerful force"[158]

I imagine my grandmother trying to survive in South Korea, with so much anxiety, in a new nation struggling with "its own nightmare of poverty [and] a smashed economy"[159], while protecting her kids from whispers and rumors of her family's socialist ties, which made them vulnerable to Rhee's dictatorship. I wonder about the embarrassment my father must have felt that his father, whom he never met, was an enemy of the state. I've asked my father about this time in his life, but it seems that he wants to forget: "why would you want to know? It was hard

[158] Michael E. Robinson, *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History* (University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 122.
[159] Ibid, 120.

for everyone." It wasn't until 2016 that I heard more about his earlier years. My father and I traveled to South Korea in 2016, thinking that my grandmother's death was imminent due to her worsening Parkinson's Disease. She had suffered for a long time by then. After we visited my grandmother with my uncle, the three of us went out for dinner. As my father and my uncle drank more and more shots of *soju*, they started to talk about the past: "I am so glad our kids don't have to grow up like us"; "Thank goodness." I think my father would be glad for his memories to die with him. They are memories to be forgotten, which would be apt considering the source of his trauma. It reaffirms for me that no one seems to want to remember the Korean War besides celebrating the American men who survived with ceremonies and medals.

As we talked about in the previous chapter, the Korean War is called the "Forgotten War." However, for the people living on the Korean peninsula, the Korean War never ended. The 38th Parallel is only two and half hours away on public transit from Seoul, South Korea, a city with a population of 9.7 million people. One of the great global cities lives under the shadow of missiles perpetually pointed in its direction. The reality of North Korea is ever present in the background of the people's lives; the sound of missile siren tests remind Seoulites that they are still at war, even if most try to avoid thinking too deeply concerning unending war.[160] All men in Korea are forced to serve in the armed forces so they know how to follow orders and to kill because the war is still ongoing. For the Korean War to be "forgotten" is a willful denial of reality. It's an intentional erasure of history that critiques the empire behavior of the US. If the

[160] Jason Strother, "For Younger South Koreans, the Korean War Is Just Ancient History," *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 27, 2013, https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2013/0727/For-younger-South-Koreans-the-Korean-War-is-just-ancient-history#:~:text=But%20despite%20the%20ongoing%2C%20and,country%20actually%20started%20the%20conflict.

war is “forgotten,” it means the life of people like my grandmother and my father are forgotten and unheard, despite the fact that my father continues to live with the trauma of the war. To my mother, I’ve lamented about why my father is the way he is, which sometimes poisons himself and his family with overwhelming anxiety. My mother will only say, “your father didn’t grow up with a dad. You must understand that.” My father always seems to have to prove something to others and the world through his work beyond reason, which causes him to risk the safety of his family. “Your father doesn’t know how to relax and enjoy life, because of how he grew up.” To me, it’s clear that war and oppression make up the soil of my relationship with my father. When I see photos of children of Palestine living with war, I can’t help but wonder about my father. Has he been able to heal? Is healing possible? Is forgetting the only way for any sort of life? This is not uncommon for the children of Korean parents who survived the war and American empire in Korea.[161]

My father’s unheard stories become unknown stories which nonetheless make up the foundation of the Korean American experience; these unknown stories are hidden beneath the feet of the next generation of Korean Americans in pursuit of the supposedly achievable American dream. Left to American empire, my father’s story becomes something about the immigrant who came to the United States, bought a house, and sent his kids to college. His story thanks the United States for its role in creating opportunities for his prosperity and freedom. However, this is a myth. In Korea, as discussed in the previous chapter, the United States acted, as it does today, on behalf of its own interests, and so my father and mother were presented few options for their thriving. The true story is forgotten and unknown by design:

[161] Grace M. Cho, *Tastes Like War: A Memoir* (Feminist Press, 2021), 170-175.

"There are multiple hegemonic forces that have worked to keep things hidden about the Korean diaspora from the Korean diaspora."[162] In the United States, there is a myth that we sent over young men to die sacrificially for the sake of the South Korean people in the name of democracy against the evils of communism. This myth also exists in the bodies of my parents, who believe America "saved" Korea from evil. This is the result of American mythmaking by way of American evangelicalism for the sake of gaining power and wealth. In *Race for Revival*, Helen Jin Kim explains that,

> (Between 1950 to 1980) evangelicalism is a movement on the move, a shape-shifting network based in transnational one-on-one relationships that have religious, racial, and political consequences. Furthermore...these networks then went on to shape modern evangelical America into an empire as it reveals how white and nonwhite people built its global infrastructure, but with varying degrees of ownership. Indeed, as this history shows, modern evangelical America was built by many hands.... Yet key segments of it have defended its whiteness, rendering invisible the very people who constructed it and upon whom its vision and mission depend.[163]

Kim goes on to argue that Korean people would find avenues for immigration to the United States and social power in Korea if they bought in to the supposed ordained mission of American empire in Korea through their participation in American evangelicalism and by pacifying the insecurities of white supremacy. I wonder if my parents have bought in to the myth of American heroism and the American Dream in order to survive as well.

This is not the first time the church has become a tool for empire expansion aided directly by some of history's most notable priests, pastors, and preachers. Helen Jin Kim's work

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[162] Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (U of Minnesota Press, 2008), 195, Kindle Edition.
[163] Helen Jin Kim, *Race for Revival: How Cold War South Korea Shaped the American Evangelical Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 8-9.

on American evangelicalism in Cold War Korea reveals that American evangelicalism has an ancestor in British evangelicalism embodied by the ministry of George Whitehead during the Seven Years War, for example. Professor of American Religious History Peter Choi, says,

> In [Whitehead's] stark and binary view of the world, Britain was the angel entrusted with the heroic task of slaying France. With the battleground so clearly laid out, he could move seamlessly from hoping for victory in war with France to declaring success in gospel preaching because he saw continuity between these purposes. Even when setbacks on the battleground piled on, Whitefield continued to express hope in Britain's providential destiny, oddly mixing military and soteriological metaphors by praying for "the late defeat" to "be sanctified."[164]

Choi explains in his work, *George Whitefield: Evangelist for God and Empire,* that Whitefield throughout his life used the Gospel as a vehicle for the expansion of British culture and dominance. Whitefield was especially gifted in converting the fervor of revival movements in his efforts to promote the British society to the world. American evangelicalism's desire for dominance over the Korean soul is not unique to American culture. Rather, Christianity, when it loses focus on Jesus' liberative center, is easily manipulated by any empire it so that it becomes like an AR-15 to the detriment of vulnerable people, for the purposes of expansion, military occupation, and plunder of resources, no matter what the human cost. It is this corruption of empire that leads Whitefield to say, concerning the benefit of slavery for Black bodies in the US,

> your present and past bad Usage of them, however ill-designed, may thus far do them good, as to break their Wills, increase the Sense of their natural Misery, and consequently better dispose their Minds to accept the Redemption wrought out for them, by the Death and Obedience of Jesus Christ.[165]

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[164] Peter Y. Choi, *George Whitefield: Evangelist for God and Empire* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2018), 82.
[165] Ibid, 57.

With empire, a Christian "hero" for the European/American Christian movement becomes a warning sign, an enemy to the Gospel. Perhaps this is why awareness of Whitehead's empire partnership is buried deep under the myths.

Thus, due to the acceptance or strategic tolerance of American empire myth, growing up in the Korean church in America, which tends to be conservative and evangelical in theology and worship across denominations, political/prophetic critique of empire was never heard. As mentioned in the previous chapter, growing up in San Diego, living only two hours' drive to Koreatown in Los Angeles, I did not hear one reflection, sermon, Bible study, or even a discussion among members concerning the LA "Riots" of 1992. The first time I had heard about "Saigu"[166] I was 39 years old (I am 41 now as I write this in January of 2025). Though the LA Riots are a seminal event of the Korean American experience in the United States, my upbringing is void of the meaning and ramifications of it. Rather, my narrative as a Korean American is shaped by my parent's hope of capitalistic material success in empire and avoidance of white violence. I will never forget what my father told me after I preached about the murder of George Floyd and the sin nature of US policing norms while serving a white church in Western New York: "Steve, you shouldn't preach about that kind of stuff. White people don't like it." My dad was right. They did not accept it if it meant losing their definition of peace and church "unity" with members of the church and outside community who place blue line stickers on their trucks or plant Trump flags on their lawns. I would have to leave because it was unsafe for me and they were forced to send me a letter of apology for their racism through gnashing of

[166] This is a Korean word for "April 29th," the date of the beginning of the LA "Riots," often used for yearly memorial activities in remembrance.

teeth, resistant for over a year, afraid that I was trying to gather materials to sue Youngstown Presbyterian for discrimination. Again, my integrity was questioned rather than the church.

If the ghosts of my father, who are my ghosts, inform my pastoral theology and practice, it would inspire me and demand of me to fight against the myth of American moral supremacy, a supremacy that leads to myths concerning my country's exceptionalism. It's a myth that Korean American churches also fully embrace for their own benefit. In Korean, the US is named 미국, which means "the beautiful land/country." However, it would be my work to ensure the ugly truth of this "beautiful land" be part of scriptural reflection in my preaching, teaching, and ministry design. Emphatically, I would have scriptural and theological support from the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures who rained down "woes" to their own siblings for their tolerance and promotion of injustice upon the vulnerable:

> Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked. So I will send a fire on Judah, and it shall devour the strongholds of Jerusalem.
> Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way; father and son go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink wine bought with fines they imposed. (Amos 2:4-8).

The ghosts of my father would add on,

> for the three transgressions of the US and Korea, and for four, I will not revoke punishment; because they take young Korean women to provide sex to maintain the morale of American soldiers - hoards of American men go in to the same underaged girl; they who masquerade as freedom fighters but establish military bases in Korea indefinitely for their own

> purposes; they who allow a dictator to run a 'democratic' South Korea; they who make little boys like Suk Hoan Hong have to prove his loyalty to the South and the US or else face imprisonment and social shame; they who don't allow little boys like Suk Hoan Hong to reunite with their father; they who don't allow little boys like Suk Hoan Hong to write or call his father beyond the 38th parallel.

Led by the ghosts of my family, my pastoral practice and theology would have to address these injustices. At the least, I would work to correct the narrative surrounding the "forgotten" war in the United States among Christians. It is not forgotten; my father carries it with him everywhere he goes, and God promised us that peace through justice would be the final word (Rev. 21). Suk Hoan Hong and Lee Jong Yim will know justice. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, my father every year yearns for connection to a father he has never met, his voice unheard and lost. On the anniversary of my paternal grandfather's death, my father gazes upon his picture and prays for my grandfather. My father deserves and is owed justice. Countless people of Korean descent have similar family stories and trauma. Victims of empire throughout history and the present say amen. They deserve and will know justice. My pastoral theology and practice development starts here. However, it is not just the work of Korean American clergypersons. It is the work of all those who are baptized into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The ghosts of the American Korean diaspora demand to be heard.

Chapter Four:

Pastoral Theology and Practice for Korean American Clergy

In this chapter, I present findings from interviews conducted in the summer to fall of 2024 with five pastors who identify as Korean American clergypersons. The purpose of these interviews was to discover whether Korean American clergypersons operate from their Korean diaspora identity and family history. The data collected and presented in this chapter helps this paper to offer comparative narratives on how, if at all, other Korean American clergypersons consider their Korean diaspora family stories and Korean history as they pastor their congregations in preaching, teaching, and leadership. The analysis presented below in this chapter provides support for the arguments presented in this paper.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The five participants serve congregations located in northern California (three), Virginia near Washington D.C. (one), and New York City (one). Two identify as female, and two as male. One participant identifies as queer. Three identify as second generation, meaning that they were born in the US while their parents immigrated from South Korea. The other two identify as one point five generation, which means they were born outside of the US, but they immigrated with their Korean parents at a young age. Besides one pastor, who serves a Korean American (English-speaking) congregation, the other pastors serve congregations of mostly white members. All pastors serve mainline congregations (PCUSA and UMC) as lead pastors (three) or associate pastors (two). All participants mention growing up as Christians in conservative immigrant Korean church contexts. All participants also describe their ministry as justice-oriented; for instance, they have experience in church work for full LGBTQ+ inclusion and

for the eradication of systemic racism in the church. Participants would be described as progressive clergypersons due to their stand for the full inclusion and participation of people who identify as LGBTQ+ in the church.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

All participants were interviewed for one hour, at maximum, on ZOOM, with the same set of questions (APPENDIX A). The questions were provided at least a few days before the interview. I transcribed the recorded interviews and parsed out repeated themes from the data of all participant interviews, which are presented below.

RESULTS

In this section, I present two themes from the interviews with all participants as it relates to a Korean American pastoral theology and practice centered on Korean diaspora history and family stories (ghost stories).

1) **Seminary courses did not equip the participants on how to reflect on their Korean diaspora identity and Korean history when developing a pastoral theology and practice.** If pastors were attracted to liberative theologies, exposure to non-Korean liberative theologies from history and present-day was the cause.

None of the five participants could say much concerning the impact of pastoral leadership or care classes during their seminary education. When presented with the questions for theses interviews, participant one stated,

> I'm going to be honest. A lot of your questions are so hard for me. Like, I looked at them and I was like trying to (pause) I'm somewhat unprepared to give useful answers. I won't even say intelligent. In seminary, you took the pastoral care classes, as your padding class, for your GPA, and no one went to it. And they're like, it's just, it's intuitive.

Others shared that rather than the seminary informing them through courses/materials covered, their greatest learning came from meeting diverse groups of students who introduced them to other ways of being Christian. As participant two put it, rather than courses or professors making an impact on their current pastoral theology and practice, seminary was mostly a chance to meet a diverse student body made up of peers who, for example, identify as womanist theologians, queer Christians, and Christian community organizers, who exposed them to liberative ways of pastoral work which were not found in their immigrant Korean church backgrounds. This opportunity in seminary was cited by other participants:

> When I went to McCormick Seminary, and the time period that I went there, it was particularly good for me to get some experience in these different ways. You know, it was under 50% white, under 50% Presbyterian. And, we had a lot of people from different faith communities, but particularly from minoritized Christian communities that reflected a lot of the whole Chicagoland area. (Participant 5)

When the participants did mention a seminary course or a professor as an important educational moment of their pastoral training, the professors were a Korean woman - two female participants mentioned a Korean American female professor - or a Black man:

> And, you know, when it came to looking at pastoral care, our professor was an African-American professor who himself had integrated a lot of the institutions on his way out. He was, I think, the first ever football player at Princeton University. And, one of the classes he taught that I took was pastoral care in a Black church context. And I took it at that time because I needed a pastoral care class. I had to take it. It was really valuable because it automatically assumed pastoral care having to deal with all sorts of things happening in the real world (Participant 5).

This pastor found benefit from a pastoral care class by accident. However, because it was taught by a Black American professor, from the Black church tradition, which, as discussed earlier in this paper, is founded upon the suffering bodies of Black Americans and their thriving

despite systemized oppression, the pastoral care course opened a liberative way for pastoral work for this participant. Others looked towards the historical situation in Germany during Nazi rule, as with participant four, who mentioned the work of liberative theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis were also mentioned during discussions about what kind of pastoral work motivated them for their ministries. It is interesting to note here that no participants mentioned any Korean or Korean diaspora history, nor even any AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) history, when discussing some of their inspirations from the history of Christianity for their pastoral formation. This is more surprising for me when you remember three of the five participants live in the Bay Area, California, a goldmine of AAPI history, and an area where AAPI make up a significant part of the general population.

2) **Korean diaspora history and family ghost stories are not part of their pastoral theological and practice development or inspiration for their current ministries, even if they personally find relevance in Korean Christian history.** Their Korean church upbringings, for the most part, are mentioned as something to forgive and give mercy to rather than be empowered by.

When asked to describe their pastoral theology and practice, all participants seemed to struggle to provide an answer. Listed here are the highlights of their responses (some quotations edited for clarity):

Participant 1	"My number one answer is probably my husband because he's not a Christian and it was in seminary that I was exploring the doctrine of predestination and like, you know, I read Von Balthasar's "Dare We Hope that All Men Be Saved?" And then there's Karl Barth, right? And all that kind of stuff. And, so, in terms of shaping the pastor that I am today...(it's) being married to a non-Christian person where so much of the Christianity that I grew up in was, 'this (faith) is a means to eternal salvation', right? 'Go proselytize so that your friend, your third-grade friend, doesn't burn in hell

	for eternity.' Right? And then that all fell apart when I was confronted with this person who is the love of my life, right? And I'm like, so everything that I've been told to believe is telling me that this person is going to die in hell. And, also, what I believe to be true as made evident to me in the Bible through Jesus Christ, is that Jesus loves all of us way more than we could ever imagine. So if God loves (my husband) more than I do, how is it going to go down the way that I've been told? That (the love for my husband) is the single historical event that no one else in the tradition celebrates. It's very unique to me. So I don't know if this is a narcissistic answer, but that is what has shaped me to be the pastor that I am today. So that's kind of what has been the catalyst of how else can we make the love of God more expansive than we could have ever imagined in human space."
Participant 2	She talked about her work in LGBTQ and AAPI justice advocacy as clergy of a predominantly white congregation. She has been performing the work of the "teacher" as a person of color, which is exhausting.
Participant 3	"I went to seminary for biblical studies and I wasn't, when doing my courses, I wasn't thinking about 'how do I make meaning out of what I'm learning for others?' I was just more, I don't know, I guess like selfishly absorbing and going through my deconstruction process. But now that I'm in church settings, in other settings too, like when I'm speaking with other Christians or even people of the Jewish or the Muslim faith, I feel like I have to be a little bit more…I can't just say things that I know or have learned from biblical studies. I have to take into account where people are individually and their spirituality and their faith. So, I find that I have to create meaning also for myself in order to transmit that meaning for others. Because it's so easy to deconstruct and then just be like, 'Hey! Take that!'"
Participant 4	"My pastoral theology is somebody who leads, who guides community...I feel like a pastor is one who is tasked with leading (justly) and guiding." "If you ask 'who's a good pastor?', it's the pastor that does good administrative work, because their churches grow, with people who have good administrative leadership, right? And, so because growth is also based on that, because numbers are, you know, other numbers are based on that, it's to me that then it becomes like the administrative leadership is really what gets rewarded, right?" Participant 4 wants to be a pastor who inspires people to make their faith contextual to who they are, "I've always loved creating conversation space and helping people to think things differently. And, to hopefully come up with some of their own ideas of how to do faith."

Participant 5	"It's my job as a pastor to help the community live into its mission effectively. And a lot of times that has more to do with a lot of things that people think of as being pastoral and more to do with just things like empowering people or releasing or, you know, just sort of encouraging people to fill in different roles in the community." "I would say that if there's anything about my theology that's pastoral in the traditional sense, it's really about trying to get people to be aware of the fact that Christian life is meant to be lived in community and to really fight against the, I would say, white theology, white American theology of this sort of individual relationship with Jesus Christ." "For me, pastoral theology is a lot more like community organizing or executive leadership, coupled with a lot of church, group, relational dynamics."

As is evident in the highlighted responses, Korean American clergypersons tend to have generalized definitions of pastoral theological practice that negate their ethnicity. Korean diaspora history or their family ghost stories in the context of the Korean war and immigration do not factor into the pastoral practice and theology of this study's participants. This is not to say that the Korean church or their Korean American experience did not come up in our conversations. Some of the participants proudly shared stories about their grandparents and fathers who remain heroes of the faith for them. For example, participant three (she/they) stated,

> I think back on who he [participant's grandfather] was as a pastor and how influential he appeared to be in his community and how his presence just gave people a sense of confidence. And, I'm 5 feet 3.5 inches tall. I'm the opposite of what my grandfather was. And, so, I guess, like, I think back on him and I try in some ways to be at least a third of the man that he was. But, I also think, realizing that his theology differed a lot, like his politics and his theology is the opposite of where I am. And, yeah, I guess I carry a little bit of that history. And, also, my dad, who went to jail a lot for protesting. I carry those stories with me. And, I am curious like "what, what am I doing?" What is, what is the third person

> [participant is a 3rd generation pastor] in line in this field of work doing for my community?

This is the same grandfather who told participant three, "if you become a pastor, you're going to be a heretic" because he didn't believe women were allowed to be pastors. She/they wondered if her/their grandfather would be accepting and proud of her/their ministry as a pastor of a congregation. Yet, graciously, this participant still honored him as an ancestral pastoral hero. Also, as she/they praise her father's example of sacrificial political ministry work, she/they do not connect the dots to include her/their father's ministry story into her/their own description of pastoral theological practice. In another example, participant one mentioned her grandfather who was among the first Korean men to become ordained in the Presbyterian church under the mentorship of Samuel Moffett, the notable Presbyterian missionary, who was active in Korea from 1889 until Japanese rule forced him back the United States.

Yet, the Korean church upbringing of all the participants is strained and complicated, even if some have forgiven their Korean church. Participant five says frankly,

> I look at the history of the missionary movement in Korea and the ways that it formed the Christian communities that shaped people like my parents that they brought back over (to the US) with them. And, I think a big influence is wanting **not** [*emphasis added by author*) to be like that in many ways. Being about sort of putting your head down and not knowing what's going on in the rest of the world and just trying to be personally pure as some like mystic vaccination against bad luck in the world or something like that (Participant 5).

This demonstrates that the seminary and the church does not provide space and opportunity for Korea's haunted history to influence the formation of pastoral theological practice. It supports my conviction that the stories of the Korean American diaspora, victims and survivors

of empire violence and oppression, must be heard for all pastoral candidates. For that matter, it ought to be heard by all Christians who want to do the work of the liberative Gospel of Jesus. At the present time, not even the children of the Korean American diaspora incorporate them into their daily pastoral work and reflection with intentionality.

To be fair, is there a congregation that even wants this from their pastor? What good would it serve a Korean American clergyperson to pastor from their Korean diaspora history? When congregations fill out a ministry profile and ordains a Pastor Nominating Committee with the laying of hands to find their next pastor, then publishes a call to ronin clergy to apply, do these communities want someone like Moses who is sent to drown empires, like the United States? The answer being, of course not. From my experience, pastors endanger their reputations and careers, thus, access to shelter, food, medical insurance, and mental health, even with the whispering of the thought of removing the American flag from the sanctuary, for example. Perhaps, this is why most seminary education centers male, white-European/American pastoral experience within the framework of empire, and individualistic and capitalistic success. Submitting to the demands of American empire as Christian institutions seek to escape death seems to be determining the product. This critique is in reference to the reality that historical pastoral figures from oppressed people groups, the *minjungs*, are not the foundation for pastoral/Christian education in the United States - this is a reason that liberative theologies exist in the first place. If seminaries centered these theological bodies, would it not lead to a rejection of the mechanisms of its existence in hopes of a resurrected future? Would it be possible for American seminaries to own land once inhabited by the American indigenous and still have integrity within the Gospel, for instance? In the current political climate at the

writing of this sentence (March 14th, 2025), with institutions of higher education being threatened with financial and political penalties for “woke” programs and “woke” teaching material, Christian institutions - which confess to believe in the power of the Gospel and celebrate Good Friday to Resurrection Sunday every year - must show empire that God is not someone to be crossed. With green card holding students illegally arrested and threatened with deportation by the Trump administration for protesting against America’s and Israel’s empire violence against the children of Palestine, who *minjung* theologians would consider *minjung*, this is especially true and an awesome opportunity. However, as other institutions like Columbia University bend the knee and allow their brave and just-minded students to become political prisoners, I wonder if the Christian institution will follow considering most of its programs are not dangerous to white nationalist Christianity and the Trump regime. The interview data I presented in this chapter demonstrate this reality. Seminary courses or academic programs were not the main motivator for the participant’s move towards works of true inclusion and justice.

Yet, there is hope. Hope is found in the body of *minjung* people groups. Besides one pastor, who shared taking an impactful pastoral care course taught by a Black professor, a course he took by accident due to lack of choice for a credit he needed for graduation, the other pastors, who would describe themselves as “progressive,” could not recollect an impactful course for their current social justice work as clergypersons. These pastors would credit their current pastoral passions for equity and justice in the world to their encounter with fellow students as seminarians. They met queer Christians and other Christians of color who exposed them to other ways of theology beyond the white or Korean conservative contexts of their

Christian upbringing. It was the *body* of a queer classmate which opened new possibilities for pastoral work for most of the pastors I interviewed, for example. This gives me some hope that perhaps students can inspire each other as they study the liberative Gospel when the courses offered may lack. I also hope that Korean American diaspora clergypersons will explore the bodies of their family, especially during Japanese empire imperialism, Korean War, and the American empire era, which continues to this day. All of us have ghosts who need to be heard by the church and to the ends of the earth. We must also demand that seminary education places importance on our family ghost stories for the sake of its own salvation and the American church, a body of people instrumental to such social disasters as the rise of Trump and his henchmen. Jesus talked about his people being the light, yeast, and salt of the world (Luke 13:20, Matthew 5:13-14); New Testament professor Ulrich Luz explained, "salt is not a salt for itself; it is a seasoning for food. In the same way the disciples are there not for themselves but for the earth."[167] Unfortunately, God's people have become a toxin to many vulnerable people. Repentance is nowhere in sight.

[167] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: a commentary on Matthew 1–7* (Fortress Press, 2007), 206.

Discussion: A More Accurate Gospel

This work for me has been powerful and helpful because I am allowed to imagine something new for the earth anchored by the ghosts of my body. It has been a formative experience of remembering the stories that led up to my body, which influence my life to this day, seen or unseen. This imagining has been sad for me as well. I look back at my earlier ministry and feel remorseful – especially - to the youth and young adults, and older adults I've preached and taught to. I gave them an individualistic, therapeutic, and capitalistic success-orientated Gospel, which was given to me as a young Christians and adult Christian as well. It is what the church wanted from me, and I gave it to them. In moments when I didn't give the church what they wanted, swift reprimand followed. I remember once preaching to youth members that the world doesn't need more successful college graduates, rather we need more people who pick up the cross of liberation for all people as Christ had done. The reaction to my utterance, "we don't need more successful college graduates" was swift. I was accused of discouraging the youth from going to college. I tried to explain that my intention was not to teach the youth to dismiss the importance of attaining a college degree and tried to argue the theological importance of the current moment and history of anti-blackness in the United States in the aftermath of the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, in 2014 and the rise of Christian nationalism with the actions of Trump, specifically the "Muslim Ban" during his first term in office. However, my arguments went unheard and unconsidered, as did my hopes for a discipleship moment, as some parents felt their child's drive to success in college may have been hindered by their pastor. Thus, I am also saddened remembering and realizing that I wasted my precious time and resources in my past congregations preaching, teaching, designing

works, and envisioning about the God who drowns empire's pharaohs; God who overtakes societies, which crush the poor and powerless as this creator offers a new way of life in which all members of humanity are free to thrive. I take blame here because I expected a culture which didn't exist in the congregations that I worked for despite their claims of a desire to live into the liberative center of the Gospel. I can only imagine what my work in a parish would be like if I am free to implement a pastoral theology and practice which centers stories like my grandmother's, a *minjung*.

Especially as we enter the second Trump presidency, with the vast majority of American Christians[168] celebrating the supposed God-ordained messianic restorer of heteronormative and "America-first" (empire-first) values, people who believe in the liberative Gospel must counter this movement by training the next generation of clergypersons and Christians with clear intention. I am not so sure it will be found in the PCUSA, the denomination of my ordination, with a majority white and privileged membership (70% white), with a median age of 61.[169] Recently, a synod executive in the PCUSA told me, "the PCUSA is 'purple' (a word used to describe a community which invites people belonging to both republican and democratic parties) and I am happy that it is." This echoes what I've heard from others in the PCUSA, clergy and lay members. There is an odd pride that Trump and his supporters may find a civil space of

[168] "New post-election research shows that Christian support was crucial in Donald Trump's 2024 landslide victory, showing that Christians made up 72% of the electorate and gave Trump 56% of their vote. In comparison, among people of other faiths or no faith, Vice President Kamala Harris was preferred with 60% of the non-Christian vote. Although Harris won a larger share of the non-Christian vote than Trump's share of the Christian votes, Christians outnumbered non-Christian voters by more than a five-to-two margin—delivering the decisive Nov. 5 victory to President Trump." See: Tracy Munsil, "Decisive Christian Vote Carries Trump to Historic Victory, Post-Election Research Shows - Arizona Christian University," *Arizona Christian University - Transforming Culture With Truth*, November 14, 2024, https://www.arizonachristian.edu/2024/11/14/decisive-christian-vote-carries-trump-to-historic-victory-post-election-research-shows/.

[169] See: https://church-trends.pcusa.org/overall/pcusa/membership/

safety and inclusion in the PCUSA. This is unacceptable if the PCUSA proclaims to be a movement that,

> believe(s) that Jesus Christ made it clear in his teachings we have an ethical responsibility to engage in issues of social justice. Our social witness stance is affirmed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which encourages church members and leaders to go to places of suffering and need to alleviate poverty, stop violence, protect the planet from climate change, and seek justice for immigrants, the LGBTQIA+ community, and people of color. By engaging in those issues from a biblical perspective, the church recognizes God's sovereignty over every aspect of human life.[170]

Yet, the PCUSA allows a "Christian" to cheer on Donald Trump's agenda and remain in good standing. As I write this on January 25th, 2025, Trump has swiftly eliminated governmental programs and policies designed to protect historically marginalized people groups.[171] If statistics stay on trend with 2020,[172] when Trump lost the presidential election, it is safe to assume that more than 50% of PCUSA members voted for Trump in 2024 (it is estimated that 56% of mainline Christians voted for Trump in 2024).[173] The more than half of PCUSA members who remain as members, elders, and pastors of the PCUSA, have already shown their faith to the Gospel they claim as frauds. They cannot claim ignorance on Trump's immoral political leadership.

A Korean American diaspora centered pastoral theology and practice, anchored by *minjung* theology, for the global church has a part to play in resistance to the church's willing

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[170] "Social Witness," *PC(USA)*, https://pcusa.org/about-pcusa/who-we-are/social-witness.
[171] The White House, "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity," *The White House*, last modified January 22, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-illegal-discrimination-and-restoring-merit-based-opportunity/.
[172] Ryan Burge, "How 40 Protestant Denominations Voted in the Last Four Presidential Elections," *Graphs about Religion*, October 10, 2024, https://www.graphsaboutreligion.com/p/how-40-protestant-denominations-voted.
[173] George Barna and Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, *2024 Election Research – Report #2*, November 13, 2024, https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CRC-Release-Post-Election-Nov-13-2024-Christian-Vote-Hands-Trump-Victory.pdf.

submission and outright promotion of someone like Trump. It is my opinion as well as experts in some respects[174] that this time in our history is a mirror image of the German society, a "Christian" society, entrusting in a person like Hitler to "Make America Great Again." This is why this work is vital at this time in the church. We need to reimagine the church from the ground up. From the way we worship, where we gather, read and teach the scriptures, design ministry, train our leaders and pastors, the center and grounding must come from the *minjung* of creation, like my grandmother and the Korean people who lived through Japanese empire and American military dominance; like the Japanese Americans incarcerated in WWII; like Addie Mae Collins (14 years old), Cynthia Wesley (14), Carole Robertson (14), and Carol Denise McNair (11), who were murdered by white supremacist terrorism; like Matthew Shephard crucified; like the women of Vietnam raped by American servicemen supposedly deployed for their freedom from evil communism; like the millions of Jewish people burned in camps all over Europe; like the people of Palestine obliterated by American killing machines and tools and Zionist violence; the people who wait on the US border after surviving an exodus journey with their young children just hoping for a chance to clean our mess and pick our fruits; or the people in the United States who live paycheck to paycheck, living with the perpetual anxiety of attempting to feed their children and pay their rent in their bodies - in a society that blames them for their suffering and poverty. This honors the best and ultimate hope of *Minjung* Theology, which Korean American diaspora have claim to, bought by the suffering and sacrifice of our Korean families, victims to empire, as well as our experience as the other in the United States. To

[174] Stéphanie Trouillard, "What Parallels Do Historians See Between the Trump Administration and the Nazi Regime?," *France 24*, March 7, 2025, https://www.france24.com/en/americas/20250307-what-parallels-do-historians-see-between-the-trump-administration-and-the-nazi-regime.

believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior and to belong to a church in the United States at present is not enough for liberation from "the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). Truthfully, to belong to an American church today as it always has been might mean you are part of the cosmic powers of darkness. The Christian community needs to be precise on what conversion means for the person and their world. The Christian faith cannot tolerate "purple." The Christian faith cannot tolerate Trump or people who boastfully and pridefully put their trust in him. As Jesus himself testified, he is here to separate and categorize us as "goats" or "sheep" according to our justice and mercy toward those he came for (Luke 4:18-19 and Matthew 25); rather his Good News is going to cause schism:

> Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! *From now on five in one household will be divided* (emphasis added), three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law (Luke 12:51-53).

Precision for the sake of liberative ministry and Christianity's identity in the world is possible with a pastoral theology which centers the sociological ghosts of my Korean family. This means that my pastoral theology and practice is *biased* towards *minjung* like my grandmother and my father. Anyone is invited to consider, repent, participate, and be included in the movement, but theologies that promote Christian nationalism, systemic racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and the capitalistic spirit to necessities of life, which were given as gifts to humanity as told in Genesis 1, will not and cannot be tolerated. Those things will be thrown into the lake of sulfur (Rev. 20:10) so that all can experience true safety from suffering

and death (Rev. 20:3-5). This is what my grandmother needs to hear and see from her pastor and church.

In 2016, when Trump started his first term as President of the United States with the help of a substantial number of white American mainline Christians and a dominant number of evangelical Christians, I contemplated leaving Christianity, grieving the past ten years of my life as a possible waste. Thankfully, 2020 marked a shift. When I started my Doctor of Ministry studies at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 2020, my optimism for the future of the church was at an all-time high. I was excited to start a program where "whiteness will be decentralized"[175] in the church and, finally, start a new chapter of disruption[176] with, perhaps, a doctorate in hand. After 10 years of ministry in conservative non-denominational or conservative Korean church settings, I was also freshly ordained in the PCUSA and working for a "progressive" church, which followed a fruitful Clinical Pastoral Education residency as a hospital chaplain. I had found my home to preach justice from the liberative Gospel with a community and senior pastor I could trust to have my back. At the time, the Black Lives Movement became a powerful international movement, the racist and misogynist murder of Korean and other AAPI women in Atlanta in 2021 seemed to be waking up the Korean Church to become more politically engaged for justice, and Trump was ousted in the 2020 presidential election. However, at this "progressive" church, I would face anti-Asian racism and Trump tolerance as well. As mentioned in previous chapters, I couldn't touch the American flag in the sanctuary in terms of white supremacy and empire. During my time here, the white male senior pastor, the

[175] See: https://www.pts.edu/DMin-Risking-Faithfully
[176] Ibid.

Rev. Dr. Rex Stewart, was braver and bolder on Facebook than he was in the pulpit or church leadership. He once pulled his eyes back during a staff meeting as a joke, oblivious to his juvenile, good-old-boy, racist, assery. He wrote his Doctor of Ministry project on church building expansion – does the American church need more help with this topic? As a criticism of this current Doctor of Ministry program I am attempting to finish with this project, we had to take a course in civil discourse, which meant leaning in to respectably politics as an expression of "love." With my move to the Presbytery of San Francisco, I found that I was naïve to the truth that even in this part of the country, even with progressive presbytery leadership who love to share their progressive theology, contradictory and dangerous ministry toward LGBTQ+ people was tolerated, welcomed, and it financially benefitted member congregations. It's a presbytery that hoards its immense wealth (77 million dollars in assets as of 2025) and will not even entertain a discussion concerning paying a land tax since my membership[177] though it includes land acknowledgements at every public and worship opportunity. In 2024, disaster, Trump was elected again, with more of the Christian vote from people of color (excluding the Black female community). I am especially discouraged considering my Doctor of Ministry project is about memory and empire mythmaking. It seems that most Christian people, even a meaningful number of people of color, have bought into the myth of "Make America Great Again" or forgotten their history from eight years ago to today. As I write this discussion chapter, I have decided to step away from parish ministry during my forties for now. I cannot be the pastor I want to be as reflected in this project, because, despite all its claims of desiring universal liberation, the church's primary concern is its own survival and paid out pensions like all

[177] See: https://nativegov.org/news/voluntary-land-taxes/

powerful institutions. I am forty-one years old now. I wonder where the church will be when I turn fifty. I am hoping that we will see an end to the American church as we know it during my lifetime so I can witness its resurrection into something more accurate to the liberative Gospel.

Appendix A

Questions asked to clergy participant:

- What is pastoral theology to you at this present time in your ministry career?
- Could you describe your practice of your pastoral theology?
- What kinds of historical theologies or influences do you pull from for your pastoral work? Or, what or who are your biggest influences in how you pastor and why?
- How does your identity as a Korean American clergyperson influence your pastoral theology?
- Does your family history and the stories you know of your family influence your identity as a pastor? If so, how? If not, why?
- How has your family history and the stories you know of your family influenced the formation of your pastoral theology and practice?
- What has been your experience of working for a non-Korean American parish ministry?
- Are you able to be your full self as a Korean American clergyperson? If yes, could you speak to that? If not, why do you think so?
- If you've ever worked in the Korean church, were you able to be your full self as a Korean American clergyperson? If yes, could you speak to that? If not, why do you think so?
- In what ministry settings and spaces have you experienced oppression, marginalization, erasure? How might you account for these experiences?

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