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## Book Review: Preaching to Second Generation Korean Americans: Towards a Possible Selves Contextual Homiletic

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# Asian American Theological Forum

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## **Preaching to Second Generation Korean Americans: Towards a Possible Selves Contextual Homiletic**

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Matthew D. Kim in his *Preaching to Second Generation Korean Americans* provides a “possible selves contextual homiletic” for second generation Korean Americans who encounter unique bicultural and liminal experiences as an ethnic minority in American society. From a viewpoint of homiletic and practical theology, the intent of the book is “to create a contextual homiletical approach that facilitates Korean American preachers’ exegesis of their second generation Korean American congregant’s lived experiences and simultaneously encourage imaginative and innovative processes for cultivating new possible selves (3).” Put simply, his contextual preaching seeks to formulate the congregant’s positive future self-perception toward a radical Christian existence beyond their status of cultural chaos and liminality (208).

In order to conceive his possible selves contextual homiletic, Kim adopts and critically and theoretically re-interprets three main disciplines; Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius’ social psychological theory of possible selves, Gerald Arbuckle’s cultural anthropological schema for understanding transitional cultures, and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale’s notion of contextual preaching as local ethnography. In detail, he first proposes that the model of possible selves as a conceptual framework for preaching can proffer a conduit for recognizing the congregants’ current diverse self-concepts and behavioral motivations (3). The theory of possible selves can also motivate the congregants to conscientiously execute specific actions to actualize their desired possible self (3). This theory encourages preachers to enhance their comprehension of their congregations’ past and present

memories/experiences, as well as providing possible positive self-images for the congregants. (9) Second, Arbuckle's insights on comprehension of transitional cultures are helpful for identifying second generation Korean Americans' condition of cultural chaos and liminality. Third, Tisdale's conception of preaching as local ethnography is a theoretical framework for evaluating the exegetical methods of their hearers' lived experience for sermon preparation (161). Kim extends and reconstructs each of the three theories to apply to a bicultural ethnic minority by considering the hearers' spiritual aspirations and concerns.

In order to develop his possible selves contextual homiletic, Kim includes seven chapters in total. Chapter 1 explores the first Korean immigrant's lived experiences and philosophies that have had an influence on the development of the second generation and their marginalized experience. Chapter 2 suggests Markus and Nurius' theory of possible selves as a conceptual tool for reinterpreting the congregant's ethnicity and context by examining some existing contextual preaching literatures. Chapter 3 displays his primary research method; that is, in-depth empirical and ethnographic work through semi-structured qualitative interviews of Korean American preachers and second generation Korean Americans. Chapter 4 reveals the byproduct of his empirical and ethnographic work by especially manifesting the dimension of the respondents' embodied and relational selves. Chapter 5 reinterprets Arbuckle's schema for understanding transitional culture to more thoroughly appreciate the respondents' cultural chaos and liminality. Also, this chapter explores the participants' spiritual capacities to reveal their future spiritual potentials in the notion of possible selves. Chapter 6 investigates Tisdale's preaching as local ethnography in the context of the specific ethnic minority situation to sufficiently analyze their bicultural context. In the final chapter, the author proposes his possible selves homiletic that consists of five stages to inspire the congregation to achieve a new cultural integration by experiencing their possible selves, constructive path-finding dissenters. (202)

Kim's critical insights on the five stages for the possible selves homiletic are definitely worth reading. For example, the author declares that the preacher must imaginatively articulate a corporate "context-specific vision" and "new spiritual possibilities" for the entire second generation Korean American church community (199). Moreover, with these stages, the author gives a dazzling vision toward preaching for his congregation; second generation Korean Americans as path-finding dissenters who have positive selves and can imaginatively innovate "alternative ways for the bridging of the gap between the Gospel and cultures." With their unique socio-religious experience he believes they can actualize the "radical Gospel values (197)." In other words, Kim's contextual homiletic deeply engages with the listener and revitalizes their faithful living within an eschatological perspective of God's narrative beyond their negative selves and their liminality.

Finally, this volume is a fascinating example of contextual homiletics as practical theology. Kim's contextual preaching is an especially marvelous achievement for the specific ethnic minority cohort through not only empirical and ethnographic research but also theoretical interdisciplinary conversations with cultural anthropology, social psychology and preaching. Also, the interdisciplinary research of his reconstructive work for his homiletic challenges and re-evaluates other academic fields from the perspective of the ethnically marginalized group. Thus, I recommend the volume to Korean American practical theological and homiletic researchers as well as other social and psychological researchers who have a strong interest in bicultural and ethnic studies.

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