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THE PROMISED LAND: A POSTCOLONIAL HOMILETIC OF PROMISE IN THE ASIAN AMERICAN CONTEXT

Abstract: Asian American Christians carry within them a triple consciousness by being Asian, American, and Christian. Being Christian specifically means being a pilgrim bound for the Promised Land. The Asian American pilgrim preacher's message issues from this triple consciousness and from a spirit of postcolonial liberation. Such a preacher's message is therefore a declaration or assurance of God's liberative promise of the Promised Land for Asian Americans, the Land already being realized here and now in the foreign land. By being this-earthly and other-worldly, the pilgrim preacher's message is synthetic-ethical in nature. This article shows that the triple consciousness is a further development of biblical and Augustinian idea/ideals of the Christian believer's pilgrimage.

I. Introduction

At the core of Asian American preaching is the promise of the Promised Land.¹ This thesis I base on the fact that over the past century Asian Americans² have constructed their unique faith deeply rooted in the *liminal* experience of living in a foreign land as a marginalized stranger or a "pilgrim."³ In other words, the immigrant's spiritual experience of pilgrimage, as the perpetual sojourner walking in a strange world and looking forward to another (heavenly) world, determines the constructs of faith. The metaphoric idea or the promise of the Promised Land best represents the other heavenly reality that Asian Americans perceive as the eventual terminal of their spiritual pilgrimage. What is important here is that the idea or perceived reality of the Promised Land is not really ethereal or purely other-worldly.

¹ Throughout the article, the Promised Land appears as capitalized in most cases in order to show the uniqueness of that idea in the Christian tradition and its significant theological weight in the Asian American ecclesial context. For the reason for the seemingly tautological designation of this phrase, see the Conclusion.

² Asian Americans today represent a wide range of Asian North American groups: that is, East Asian Americans (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans), South Asian Americans (e.g., Indian, Nepali, and Pakistani Americans), Southeast Asian Americans (e.g., Filipino, Malaysian, and Vietnamese Americans), and Pacific Islanders as well. This essay dare not discuss a broad spectrum of Christian spirituality or practices in faith from all different Asian ethnic groups, but instead focuses on East Asian American spirituality and its preaching practice. For East Asian Christianity is still a major player in Asian North America when it comes to spiritual influence, theological development, Christian practice, and missional energy. Research on other groups, I hope, shall follow in the future as their presence in and impact on Asian American Christianity grows. Also, when I use the term Asian American in my research, I mainly refer to first generation Asians who, though still fundamentally Asian by culture, have adopted an Americanized way of life and mostly tend to live in America for good. They are still mother-tongue speaking adults with English as their second language. As is well-known, second and third generation Asian Americans—the U.S.-born and -raised—have their particular cultural and theological perspectives and stories. Investigating this latter group's socio-ecclesial natures and homiletic practice is simply beyond the scope of this study.

³ Sang Hyun Lee adopts British anthropologist Victor Turner's term, "liminality," in order to articulate the cultural "in-between" phenomenon or experience of the Asian American immigrants. Sang Hyun Lee, *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 4-11; cf. Victor W. Turner, *Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 94ff. Lee argues that Asian Americans living "at the edge of America and also between America and Asia are placed in a liminal space . . . where a person is freed up from the usual ways of thinking and acting and is therefore open to radically new ideas." And he continues, "Freed from structure, persons in liminality are also available to a genuine communion (*communitas*) with others." Lee believes that this liminal experience of the immigrant status has significantly influenced immigrant life in general and the immigrant person's faith formation in particular. As we shall see later, based on this liminality idea, Lee suggests his creative Asian American Christian understanding of the immigrant life—the metaphoric image of the pilgrim, which is widely accepted in the Asian American socio-ecclesial context.

Rather, the desired Promised Land synthesizes this-worldliness and other-worldliness. That is, Asian Americans see the Promised Land as already being established here on American soil, yet as also having an eschatological prospect. Preaching, as the most significant moment in the weekly liturgy and spiritual life of the Asian American ecclesia,⁴ concretizes the synthetic message of the Promised Land in the most verbal and explicit sense, as I will show through examples from Eunjoo Kim's sermons toward the end of the article.

The main body of the article begins by investigating the socio-ecclesial context of Asian Americans, whose pilgrim identity is born out of their triple consciousness. Then, the article discusses the biblical (specifically, Abrahamic) and Augustinian traditions of the pilgrim spirituality that Asian Americans have adopted and adapted for their own context. Finally, I detail the Promised Land idea/ideal and the resulting Asian American pilgrim homiletic of promise. Though not explicit, the overall tone of the article is postcolonial, something that is inevitable given that a significant part of Asian American theological thought is an attempt to overcome their colonial experience, either geo-politically or spiritually. Yet, any discussion on postcolonial theology itself will remain in the background, given the article's focus on pilgrim theology and the idea of the Promised Land.⁵

II. Socio-theological Context: The Triple Consciousness of Asian American Christians⁶

Asian American Christians, as this socio-religious designation of them itself indicates, live in a threefold cultural-religious reality as *Asian*, *American*, and *Christian*. To adopt and adapt W. E. B. Du Bois' argument and terminology, Asian Americans construct their identity by means of *triple consciousness*. Du Bois once argued that African Americans live a "double consciousness" due to their two predominant social and existential realities of being African and American. They oscillate between these often conflicting identities, "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings," at times confused by and at times benefitting from the double consciousness.⁷ Yet Du Bois realized that double consciousness itself is a thing to overcome, not something to be endured helplessly or to be purposefully appropriated. Thus, he argued for the creation of a holistic self-consciousness, self-realization, and self-respect beyond the tricky double consciousness in the minds of African Americans. Building on Du Bois' argument, I therefore note that Asian American Christians have a triple consciousness: as Asian, as American, and as Christian, or specifically Christ-believing and Christ-following.⁸ Yet for Asian Americans, in contrast to African Americans, these three

⁴ For instance, Jung Young Lee writes regarding this central position of preaching in the Korean American worship, "In fact, preaching is *more than merely a part of the worship service; it is, in fact, a worship service*. Every act of worship can be regarded as preaching. Prayers, music, hymn singing, reading scriptures, the citation of creeds, and the attitude of a congregation are all forms of preaching. Each action conveys the Word of God in its own form and style (emphasis inserted)." Jung Young Lee, *Korean Preaching: An Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 41.

⁵ Some minor portions of this article are modified renditions from my previous research with a new topical angle of the Promised Land. In particular, for a full exploration of biblical-theological and cultural foundations of the pilgrim and the Promised Land ideas in the Asian American context, refer to Chapter One of my recent publication, *Evangelical Pilgrims from the East: Faith Fundamentals of Korean American Protestant Diasporas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁶ For a deeper analysis of the Asian American socio-ecclesial context, see *ibid.*, 2-11.

⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois et al., *The Souls of Black Folk Essays and Sketches* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Library, 1996), 17.

⁸ As well-known, Asian American Christian life is highly Christo-centric, whether one has conservative or progressive faith orientation. In conservatives circle, Christo-centric faith takes a form of Christian exclusivism (i.e., Jesus, the only savior of the sinful world) while the same faith provides a foundation of liberative theology (i.e., Jesus, the prototype of the religio-social revolutionary) for the progressives. In this article, I use Jesus and Christ as totally interchangeable terms with no doctrinal or historical specifications attached to them.

fundamentals of socio-religious consciousness do not necessarily contradict one another. Rather, Asian Americans find that being *triple-minded* is necessary for their survival. Specifically, their initial identity as Asian (or being a part of the Asian community) is crucial for their communal survival in the hostile foreign land, while the new identity as American is also essential for their daily socio-economic lives. At the same time, living as Christ-believing serves them as the most fundamental spiritual resolution to the inevitable psychological, social, economic, or political conflicts that stem from being both Asian and American. In what follows, Sang Hyun Lee, Matsuoka Fumitaka, and Kwok Pui-Lan each articulate how this triple consciousness plays out richly in the Asian American Christian life.

In his *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology*, Sang Hyun Lee first presents his theological analysis of the Asian American social context, especially its bicultural nature. Two concepts are significant in his writing: *liminality* and *marginality*. Asian Americans live a liminal life between two very different cultures, which makes their social status extremely marginalized from both cultures; that is, they do not and cannot truly belong to either of the two cultures, and thus are aliens to both. However, Lee is not pessimistic. Based on symbolic anthropologist Victor Turner's positive conception of liminality, Lee contends that being situated in two different cultures is a profound and complex experience in which new and creative possibilities of life are born.⁹ Lee believes in particular that this experience of cultural liminality in the Asian American context can produce three invaluable benefits: 1) openness to the new or hidden potentials of society, 2) the emergence of *communitas*, and 3) a creative space for prophetic knowledge and subversive action.¹⁰ Lee's belief is that Christ, himself a person from the social margins who once lived a liminal life between two sets of dualistic worlds (i.e., human and heavenly and Jewish and Greco-Roman), is the best model for the people of God of a person who (has) achieved the above threefold benefit. Then, Jesus-believing and Jesus-following becomes the third quintessential socio-religious consciousness of Asian Americans. That is, *being Christian* is a third ontological foundation for Asian Americans, along with *being Asian* and *being American*.

While agreeing on Lee's arguments on liminality and Christian faith as a core ontological foundation of the Asian American life, Fumitaka Matsuoka in his *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* calls for active social activism by Asian American Christians. He acknowledges that the Asian American church historically has served two socio-ecclesial functions for the people who are part of it. First, the church has been the reservoir of the original Asian cultural and linguistic heritage. In church, people celebrate their own culture and practice their own language that, outside of the church, cannot be celebrated or practiced fully. Second, the church has helped the people's cultural integration into American society and the local community, providing necessary physical/emotional and economic help.¹¹ Though Matsuoka finds these two social functions very helpful and necessary, he suggests they are insufficient, for they are too passive to make real social or spiritual changes in or out of the Asian American church, in the light of the

⁹ Lee, *From a Liminal Place*, 1-6.

¹⁰ Lee realizes that since Asian American Christians live in this unstructured, open-ended liminal space, they have a certain potential to come up with very new spiritual ideas, social structures, and cultural expressions that can contribute to the breadth, depth, and width of the existing society's cultural life. Besides, these new hybrid Asian American Christians can help the emergence of *communitas* where people from all racial and ethnic groups would, together, create a community of harmony, justice, and peace. Last, but not least, thanks to the freedom from and critical response to the existing social structure, the Asian American Christians living through liminality could possibly serve as the prophetic agents of God vis-à-vis the oft-unjust dominant culture. Ibid., 7-11.

¹¹ Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 13-15.

larger American society. Because of their “ghettoization,” Asian American Christians specifically and Asian Americans in general have been silent or silenced in the broader dominant and colonizing culture. Matsuoka encourages the church to get out of its own ethnic and cultural enclave in order: 1) to demonstrate the church’s legitimate social place in the wider society, and 2) more importantly, to envision and strive to achieve a new American social reality of racial reconciliation, political equality, and socio-economic justice based on the lessons of Christian scriptures and the liberative message of Christ. Matsuoka agrees with Lee that Asian Americans can envision this new kind of transformed American reality because they are now living in the creative space of the “state of liminality.”¹² That is, although Asian Americans seem to live in a fixed marginal reality defined by the powerful dominant culture, they are extremely open to new ideas, particularly ideas based on the vision of the Kingdom of God that could possibly transform American society.¹³ As is the case with Lee, so too Matsuoka is optimistic about the power and authority of the Christian faith in Christ the Incarnate, who once served and still serves his people in concrete human history as a realistic hope for the broken world.¹⁴

It should be noted that in their triple consciousness-based optimism or ideal of egalitarian *communitas* or the transformed American reality, Lee and Matsuoka do not hold up Asian Americans as the best sole taskforce to be utilized, however they may be effective or powerful. It will be simply too much for Asian Americans, still marginalized and forced to be in society, to take up the transformative task alone. The transformative and reconciliatory task, Lee and Matsuoka contend therefore, must be carried out by firmly establishing “solidarity” and “mutual interdependence” with *others* around them for synergic cooperative impact.¹⁵ Asian Americans can serve as initiators of that synergic impact with their fresh insights from the (positive) margins.

Postcolonial feminist theologian Kwok Pui Lan further speaks about the Asian American life and their triple consciousness from her own daily experience of “diasporic existence.”¹⁶ She finds herself in limbo or in the liminality between being Asian and American, yet more specifically between once-colonized Asia and colonizing America, and particularly so as a woman of color whose existence in North America is another form of marginalization. Pui Lan knows that she is not the only woman in this doubly vulnerable colonial-racist context. In fact most Asian American women share this predicament. Her audacious resolution for this perilous situation is a third way of postcolonial feminist theology. This theology, often Christological, is a third way since it moves beyond the dualism of colonized (i.e., Asian) and colonizing (i.e., Euro-American) and, more important, seeks the liberation of Asian American women beyond white male-dominant colonial subjugation and violent racial conflicts (e.g., white male’s dominant power over Asian American women’s lives and their hyper-sexualized bodies). Therefore, she contends that a primary task of Asian American Christians is the practice of postcolonial feminist imagination or the claim of “the Third Space” to borrow Christopher Baker’s and Homi Bhabha’s terminology.¹⁷

¹² Ibid., 61.

¹³ Ibid., 61-63.

¹⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹⁵ Ibid., 112 and S. Lee, *From a Liminal Place*, 153.

¹⁶ Kwok Pui Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 25.

¹⁷ Christopher Baker, *The Hybrid Church in the City* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 16. The Third Space is a metaphor for the Christian church’s work by which the social or religious status quo is deconstructed and a new communal hope and reality is implanted. This Third Space work is not of a “once-and-for-all” nature but should be continually renewed; Kwok Pui Lan, “Postcolonial Preaching in Intercultural Contexts,” *Homiletic* 40, no. 1 (2015): 9-10. Homi Bhabha is considered for the original coiner of the term *third space* based on his

In sum, the eventual goal of Lee, Fumitaka, and Pui Lan is the same though each one proposes different nuances and foci for this goal of people discovering and adopting a third consciousness of the Asian American life through faith in Christ, the true liberator, transformer, and reconciler. This third consciousness, and thus *triple consciousness*, generates a unique Asian American Christian faith that is beneficial not only for Asian Americans but also for all Americans, in that its goal is ultimately reconciliation between the two. What is more significant and insightful for our discussion is that the faith in Christ enables Asian Americans to envision a third liberative reality as the eventual destination of their faithful lives and the ultimate transformation of the current hostile foreign land.

How does this liberating and transformative triple consciousness actually play out in the daily and weekly spiritual lives of Asian Americans, especially in the practice of preaching? The idea of being a pilgrim journeying toward the Promised Land is central, for it promises *something more and something greater* than what Asian Americans encounter in this heart-crushing foreign land.

III. Metaphors of the Pilgrim and the Promised Land: The Bible and Augustine

As we will see in the next sections, because the metaphoric ideas of the pilgrim and the Promised Land prevail in Asian American spirituality and thus in the practice of preaching, so too do they pervade triple consciousness. Where does the idea or ideal of the pilgrim journeying toward the Promised Land originate? Among numerous sources, the Abrahamic story from the Hebrew Bible and St. Augustine's pilgrim theology are primary and are two sources that Asian Americans have adopted and adapted for their own use.¹⁸

From the beginning of Genesis through the end of Revelation, the themes of pilgrimage and of the Promised Land represent core theological understandings of humanity and earthly life.¹⁹ The Genesis account narrates the story of paradise lost, in which the first

postcolonial notion of *hybridity*. He notices that people oscillating between the colonizer's hegemonic-cultural authority and the person's initial cultural orientation comes to formulate a hybrid identity that is very new to the former two though emerging and taking certain characteristics from the two. This new hybrid identity appears as disruption and displacement of the existing colonial powers which cannot fully grasp the new cultural thrust and creativity of the hybrid people and thus dismiss it by their typical universal cultural claims. Translated politically or sociologically, this hybrid people become a key source of protest, subversion, reconstruction, and of colonial-hegemonic society. Where the existing-exclusive colonial status quo is subverted, the people of hybrid identity newly create the more inclusive third space that "initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation." (1994: 1) In short, the hybrid people convey a considerable potential to become a counter-hegemonic agent and startling (or "shocking" to the colonial authorities) socio-political innovator. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, Routledge, 1994); Homi K. Bhabha, "Frontlines/Borderposts," in *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*, ed. Angelica Bammer (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994), 269-272; Homi K. Bhabha, "Cultures in Between," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London, Sage Publications, 1996).

¹⁸ It is commonly known and accepted that St. Augustine's political thoughts and pilgrim ideal have deeply penetrated spirituality, theology, and ethics of the Korean church since its missional inception. Jiwhang Lew, among many, provides a persuasive account regarding how St. Augustine's pilgrim ideal has (re)directed the Korean Church's self-identity as an ethical and political agency in society. In particular, Lew acknowledges the pilgrim life as one's socio-ethical response to God's love to the world (or to sinners). Jiwhang Lew, "Politics of Virtue: St. Augustine's political thought considered for the Korean Church in national division" PhD diss, Northwestern University, 2000, and his "The Korean Church as a Polis: A Theological Contextualization of St. Augustine's Political Thought," *The Asia Journal Of Theology* 15, no. 2 (October 2001): 324-347.

¹⁹ Three authors, Gordon McConville, Andrew T. Lincoln, and Steve Motyer each investigate pilgrimage as it appears respectively in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and Pauline writings. See chaps. 2-4 in *Explorations in Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, eds. Craig G. Bartholomew and Fred Hughes (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

human beings are thrown into the earthly wilderness, or “exile” as Dee Dyas calls it,²⁰ where they are to “till the ground from which [they were] taken.”²¹ As the continuing account of Genesis recalls, however, the exiled humans are not completely alone in their wilderness. Not only does God prepare garments to clothe Adam and Eve, but that God still cares for fallen humanity is something that their offspring through the generations do not forget as they “invoke the name of the LORD.”²² Yet, notwithstanding God’s care and love, humanity lives outside paradise and is on a life-time pilgrimage toward that now lost perfect reality. Many generations later, the prophet Isaiah dreams of a recovered paradise or the Promised Land in which “[t]he wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.”²³ This specific quotation from Isaiah, though not really about a fundamental human yearning toward paradise lost, nonetheless recalls his once-ruined nation’s historically recovered future. Here Isaiah uses eschatological language in order to point out his nation’s, and indeed all humanity’s, deviation from God and the resulting disharmony that can only be perfectly restored on the Last Day. Until then, we will continue on our inevitable spiritual journey, yearning for that other perfect and harmonious world.

In Genesis 12, specifically, Abraham’s story of sojourning to another land reflects the pervasive theme of spiritual pilgrimage.²⁴ On the surface, the story seems to be about a faithful person’s historical or mythic immigration to a foreign yet promised land in his obedience to Yahweh. However, on a symbolic, theological level, as Dyas points out, this story also serves as a very strong representation of all humanity’s lifetime pilgrimage to a reality prepared by God that is to be experienced beyond human history.²⁵ We see this theme of lifetime pilgrimage intensified in the intra-textual and allegorical interpretation of the Abrahamic event in the Book of Hebrews:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time *in the land he had been promised*, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose *architect and builder is God*. . . . All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, *a heavenly one*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, [God] has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16; emphases mine)

What this passage clearly demonstrates is that Abraham lived on the earth as a stranger or pilgrim, and had a desire for a better homeland, a heavenly one, whose architect is none other

²⁰ Dee Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature, 700-1500* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 14.

²¹ Genesis 3:23 (all biblical quotations from NRSV throughout the article).

²² Genesis 4:26b.

²³ Isaiah 65:25.

²⁴ Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature*, 15-16. Also see “Exile and Pilgrimage,” in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. David L. Jeffrey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 254-259. He notes, “The motif of the faithful servant of God as a pilgrim for whom this world is not his final home is deeply rooted in the exilic narratives of Genesis (the calling of Abraham) and Exodus.”

²⁵ Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature*, 15-16.

than God. The writer of Hebrews has no hesitation in calling Abraham the biblical model of a lifetime pilgrim journeying in a strange land toward a promised one. The eyes of the writer are largely focused on the *other* reality, namely the Promised Land.

Augustine further developed the spirituality of the Abrahamic pilgrimage that conveys explicit ethical claims “during the journey” before getting to the promised one. Mary T. Clark acknowledges that Augustine’s spirituality is the spirituality of pilgrimage imbued with images of wilderness, paradise, exiles, repatriation, promised land, etc.²⁶ If we understand his *Confessions* as his own “odyssey of soul,”²⁷ we see that Augustine narrates his personal life story as a journey from bondage or exile of the soul to a liberating state of absolute and infinite good.²⁸ Of this, Augustine writes: “I shall go into my own little room and sing love songs to Thee, groaning unutterable groanings during my pilgrimage, recalling in my heart the Jerusalem to which my heart has been uplifted, Jerusalem my home Jerusalem my mother.”²⁹ Augustine acknowledges that the gift of God or the Holy Spirit kindles genuine love for God in his heart, which will eventually lead him to his “home Jerusalem” where he will want to remain forever. Until he reaches that final destination, he will reside in this world as a pilgrim still tempted by worldly desires. Augustine wants to inform us that his confession on the spiritual journey, though personal, yet applies to all other fellow human beings as a universal spiritual phenomenon.

Just a decade or so after the completion of *Confessions*, Augustine had another opportunity to address this pilgrim identity of humankind for the general public. In his *The City of God against the Pagans*, it is obvious that his eyes are firmly fixed on Heaven once again. What is notable this time around is that his pilgrim spirituality does not seem to be universal anymore. Rather, the pilgrim journey is restricted only to Christians who wander the earth “on pilgrimage in this mortal state.”³⁰ Those on the pilgrim journey will be tempted by worldly pleasures, and thus some return to the City of Man that is doomed to eventual destruction on the Last Day. Yet, those who keep walking the pilgrimage way will taste “the perfectly ordered and completely harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of each other in God.”³¹ This enjoyment of God or “the [heavenly] peace,” however, does not mean that the Christian pilgrims now (must) live “above” or “out of” the world. On the contrary, their lives are very much bound to the City of Man; there is no immediate escape. Indeed, this is why they are called to be *pilgrims and not angels* in heaven. Augustine further argues that this earth-bound life of the pilgrim demands a missionary or ethical (or righteous) life style and attitude. Simply put, the heaven-bound pilgrims must differentiate themselves from those who are bound to the sinful, decaying City of Man so that: 1) Christians, by the example of their good lives, might save some others by the grace of God; and, more

²⁶ Introduction, in Mary T. Clark, *Augustine of Hippo, Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984; in the series, *Classics of Western Spirituality*), esp., 42.

²⁷ R. J. O’Connell’s interpretation of Augustine’s spirituality in *Confessions* in his *St. Augustine’s Confessions: The Odyssey of Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1969).

²⁸ Augustine and Henry Chadwick, *Confessions* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), XII, 16. However, this kind of transitory theology for “that which is above” is not always favored among Christians. Some critics, such as Craig G. Bartholomew, accuse Augustine of hyper-privileging that which is above in his theology based on neo-Platonism. Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 202. In a similar vein, Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, “[I]t was a near catastrophe for Christianity when it became more closely related to neo-Platonism than to Old Testament realism.” André Dumas, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Theologian of Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 153.

²⁹ Augustine, XII, 16.

³⁰ St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1972), XVIII, 32.

³¹ *Ibid.*, XIX, 17.

importantly, 2) they might not be tempted again into the worldly way of life.³²

This *missional-ethical* dimension of the pilgrim life is Augustine's creative development, though not unique to him; a similar idea already appears in the biblical-theological understanding of pilgrimage. However, while the latter focuses more on the dimension of the *spiritual purity* that distinguishes pilgrims from the sinful world, Augustine emphasizes the *spiritual fruits* of those pilgrims, fruits that they bear on their heaven-bound journey *here on the earth*. Thus, it is no wonder when Augustine admonishes his fellow Christians, saying, "[On your journey] do no harm to anyone" and "help anyone whenever possible."³³ For him, it is obvious that the "faith [of the pilgrim must be] put into action by love."³⁴ Yet, pilgrim Christians are not to dream of a perfectly restored world made possible by their ethical action in love. The City of Man, or those living in it alone, is ultimately bound to the eternal death. There is no conclusive salvation for it, and pilgrims are not here to save that sinful world, apparently. What pilgrim Christians can only hope for, Augustine realizes, is the faithful missional-ethical demonstration of what is coming on the Last Judgment Day and their patient journey to the heavenly, Promised Land; until then, thankfully, we are called to live "in the enjoyment of God, and of each other in God."³⁵

Both the Abrahamic account and the pilgrim idea of Augustine describe the Christian life as a continuing journey toward the Promised Land. The journey itself is the covenantal promise of God that is unbreakable. Augustine, however, expresses a somewhat stronger missional-ethical dimension of the pilgrim journey even though his eyes are fixed more on the ethereal, heaven-bound reality that is to come later.

As I discuss below, Asian Americans have adopted and adapted the pilgrim theology and the Promised Land ethos from both the biblical-Abrahamic and the Augustinian accounts in a way that best addresses their own socio-theological context. In particular, we will see that in the Asian American context the Promised Land now conveys a dual meaning, namely, of something that is *already but not yet*, a more radical development from Augustine.

IV. Pilgrimage and the Promised Land in the Asian American Context

The triple consciousness of Asian Americans has led them to look for the unique *third socio-religious identity* that goes beyond being *Asian* and *American* and also overcomes the inevitable marginality imposed by their bicultural life. At the core of their new identity are the ideas of the pilgrim and the Promised Land rooted in the biblical (especially the Abrahamic story) and Augustinian theological accounts.³⁶ Below, I explore in detail useful arguments from Lee and Fumitaka in regards to the further development of the pilgrim and the Promised Land ideas in the Asian American context, namely, the socio-religious synthesis of *this-earthliness* and *other-worldliness*.

Lee sees the Abrahamic story and other similar Bible narratives of pilgrimage,

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., XIX, 14.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., XIX, 17.

³⁶ Asian American scholars find that the theological motif of pilgrimage or life as spiritual journey is shared extensively among most Asian American ethnic groups. For a detailed discussion, see Paul M. Nagano, "A Japanese American Pilgrimage: Theological Reflections," in *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*, eds. Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 63-79; David Ng, ed., *People on the Way: Asian North Americans Discovering Christ, Culture, and Community* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996), xv-xxix; Man Singh Das, "Sojourners in the Land of the Free: History of Southern Asian United Methodist Churches,"; and Wilbur W. Y. Choy, "Strangers Called to Mission," in *Churches Aflame: Asian Americans and United Methodism*, ed. Artemio R. Guillermo (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 19-34, 65-89.

combined together, as *the* narrative(s) upon which Asian American Christians have constructed their own version of the “pilgrimage-in-the-wilderness” spirituality.³⁷ Perceiving their new socio-geographic location in the States as their own wilderness, Asian American Christians have created their own particular bicultural theological and ontological narrative ground. In a spiritual-symbolic sense, they now find the same wilderness in which Adam and Eve, Abraham, the ancient Israelites, and other faithful Christians would have walked in their own pilgrim journeys. Lee writes, “The Abrahamic obedience to God’s call has been invoked in the Asian American church. The challenge is to see the Asian immigrants’ de facto uprootedness as an opportunity to embark on a sacred pilgrimage to some God-promised [Land], and therefore to believe that life as strangers and exiles can be meaningful.”³⁸

What is particularly interesting in Lee’s development of the pilgrim and the Promised Land ideas is the strong synthesis of *this-earthliness* and *other-worldliness*; in other terms, a synthesis of social-liberative vision and eschatological hope. For Lee, the earthly wilderness on which Asian Americans journey is not to remain the wilderness forever. As they progress on their pilgrim journey, the exilic strange land where marginalization is considered “normal” will go through transformation envisioned in the hope of the ultimate Promised Land. In other words, the other-worldly Promised Land is being implanted *already here and now*. This is the real vocation of the Christian pilgrim as well as the valid promise of *Christ-Once-Marginalized-Yet-Exalted* contextually given to Asian Americans. Thus, Lee continues:

That the exalted Jesus is with us also can only mean that the community of Jesus which is still on earth has an eternal dimension; Jesus’ community is tied up permanently with the exalted head of that community. The seemingly fragile community of consciously liminal and marginalized Asian American followers of Jesus has the exalted Lord as its head and leader. This tie of the Asian American church with the exalted Lord is this eschatological future and divinely guaranteed promise. And that promise is the source of Asian American believers’ courage to live in awareness of their liminal space and the source of endurance in their struggle against marginalization.³⁹

Lee then makes another radical statement about this transformational potential and power of Asian American pilgrims, with an Abrahamic-eschatological prospect:

Abraham’s story is particularly pertinent to Asian immigrants who may be wondering what the meaning of their existence in this country is. Abraham’s story can be interpreted as saying that now that the Asian immigrants have left home and are here in America, it is an opportunity to take up the pilgrimage toward a “better America” and work to make America a country that is more according to God’s will. Their situation can be seen as a calling to live as the creative minority in America. Moreover, if Asian Christians appropriate Abraham’s story as their own, they might see their life’s goal as being to continue to live here “as strangers and foreigners” and work to build a “better America,” “whose architect and builder is God.” In this way, their Christian faith would have something to do with their identity and their life as marginalized and liminal people in America.⁴⁰

³⁷ Lee, “Pilgrimage and Home in the Wilderness of Marginality: Symbols and Context in Asian American Theology,” in *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*, eds. Ho-Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and R. Stephen Warner (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 61.

³⁸ Lee, *From a Liminal Place*, 4-11, 61-64.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

Fumitaka echoes Lee's theme of "pilgrimage-in-the-wilderness" when he acknowledges Asian American Christians as "strangers and sojourners" living in the household of God. In this foreign yet promised land, he realizes, Asian Americans have been always "on the way," not belonging to either Asia or America, but to the liminal space where their Christian faith helps them envision a new reality of America.⁴¹ Fumitaka in particular encourages Asian Americans to envision and strive to achieve a new American social reality of racial reconciliation, political equality, and socio-economic justice from their fresh marginal perspective of the world. In that respect, just as Lee articulates above, Fumitaka perceives *the Asian American pilgrim life in the spiritual wilderness* as a positive ontological-communal narrative and highly meaningful in a synthetic-eschatological sense, though he is fully aware of its limitations as well.⁴² In agreement with Lee and Fumitaka, and so also with the Abrahamic pilgrimage ethos, Wesley Woo, Chinese American pastor and scholar, states confessionally:

We still are a pursuing church, or the pilgrim of God in the Wilderness. . . . [W]e are all on the way, together. But we are not alone, nor helpless. Our fathers [and mothers] crossed over the Pacific for a new life in this [Promised Land]. They found what the life of sojourners was like, and yet, wherever they were, they were not away from the Lord's field. They met him, and built their churches.⁴³

In sum, Asian Americans have adopted and adapted the Abrahamic pilgrimage narrative in a typological sense and promoted it to a highly eschatological level that specifically addresses their unique socio-cultural context. At the same time, in a synthetic sense they have "brought down" the same eschatological promise of God—the Promised Land—to the "dusty earth" so that God's promise executes its transformative spirit and power here and now in the American wilderness. Thus, the Augustinian ethical claims on the Christian pilgrim life take on more significance or ultimate significance in the Asian American pilgrim life.

Asian American preachers have been quick to adopt and apply in their preaching this synthetic *already-but-not-yet* spirituality of the Promised Land that prevails in their congregational context. Thus, as I discuss in detail in the following section, their message is bold enough to proclaim the Promised Land (e.g., a transformed postcolonial American reality) being *already* implanted during the Asian American pilgrim journey, *yet* it also recognizes that their journey must go on because the ultimate Promised Land is awaiting them at the end of their life-long pilgrimage. There, at the final moment, they will no longer be called either Asian American or pilgrims, but will be embraced only as equal children of God along with all others.

V. The Promised Land: A Synthetic Message of Promise from the Pilgrim Preacher

We're pilgrims called by God
to continue struggling
until the day when all immigrant people,
not only [Asians] but also other ethnic groups,

⁴¹ Matsuoka, *Out of Silence*, 1, 9, 31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13-15. Here, Fumitaka points out the "ghetto" phenomenon of the Asian American church, which significantly contributed to Asian Americans being silent or silenced, in the broader culture.

⁴³ Wesley Woo, "Asians in America: Challenges for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);" (New York: Program Agency, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1987), 20.

fully belong to this new land
and equally inherit this promised land of God.⁴⁴

This sermon excerpt from Eunjoo Kim is a fine example of the synthetic message of promise by the Asian American pilgrim preacher. Kim is proclaiming God's eschatological promise (i.e., the Promised Land) "brought down" to the American soil for the sake of all children of God. That is, as a postcolonial preacher Kim *is already seeing* God's promise being achieved for all pilgrims of God in her very *sitz im leben*. In this respect, the Promised Land is the exact synonym of the ultimate promise that the Asian American pilgrim preacher can provide for her fellow pilgrims in their wilderness journey. In short, at the core of the pilgrim preacher's sermon message is always the promise that the Promised Land is being realized *today*.

Here one cannot miss the significance and legitimacy of the term *promise* that is adopted homiletically by the Asian American pilgrim preacher. In this context, the word "promise" conveys far more than do words like "vision" or "hope." *The Oxford Dictionary* defines promise as "A declaration or assurance that one will do something or that a particular thing will happen." The same dictionary defines hope as "A feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen" and vision as "The ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom."⁴⁵ What the Asian American pilgrim preacher proclaims (as Kim's example shows) is an unequivocal declaration and assurance that the Promised Land will happen (indeed is happening in the present!), but is *detectable* if only we have pilgrim eyes to see it. The ongoing realization of the Promised Land is neither a good "feeling of expectation and desire" for the Promised Land to happen nor a fine future plan full of "imagination or wisdom," even though those understandings are not entirely excluded. In short, the preacher's message is declaration, that is, promise being executed readily, solemnly, and eschatologically. This is why Jung Young Lee's sermon below may sound familiar and sweet to Asian Americans' ears:

Pioneers are people who don't go back to their homeland when they face problems and troubles in the new land. Pioneers are those who have made up their minds to stay for good in the new land. They have the faith of Abraham. They are not conformists but cultivators of a new land. We have to cultivate the wilderness if we are pioneers. Our wilderness is a society of injustice and prejudice, like a desert that is hot in the day but cold in the night. Just as the California desert was transformed into a rich soil, where many fruit trees and vegetables grow, we can and must cultivate this society to be a truly loving and caring place to live.⁴⁶

Lee calls Asian Americans "pioneers," a synonym for pilgrims, who have arrived in the new land. In their hearts, they carry the promise of a just society and caring community. Lee acknowledges this promise is as realistic and vivid as the California desert being transformed into rich soil. As promised in the Abrahamic pilgrim faith, the new land is being transformed into the Promised Land thanks to new Asian (and other ethnic) pilgrims.

What is also unmistakable in the Asian American pilgrim's homiletic of promise is the prominence of the metaphoric concept of land/Land. Land carries a multiplicity of meanings in Asian American life and theology. To begin with, Asian Americans recall their

⁴⁴ Eunjoo Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), 158.

⁴⁵ See the terms "promise," "vision," and "hope" at <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>.

⁴⁶ Jung Young Lee's sermon, "Our Thanksgiving Day," (unpublished) quoted in his book, *Korean Preaching*, 119.

lands being exploited then and now by colonial powers back in Asia. In this sense, land is a reminder of their vulnerability and sorrow. Then, Asian Americans remember the day when they had to leave their thousand-year-old ancestral lands for various reasons—political, economic, legal, etc. In this sense, land is a reminder of their displacement. Further, Asian Americans daily face the fact that they have no lands here in America they can call their own. Of course, they can purchase apartments, buildings, or ranches, yet they are still considered “strangers” and “aliens” in their communities. In this sense, land is a reminder of their temporary stay and status that inevitably burdens their psychology every day. Therefore, it is no wonder that the pilgrim preacher’s message of the Promised Land is so desirable and powerful for Asian Americans. The preacher’s message promises the eschatological *Third Land* existing beyond Asian lands to which the people cannot go back and beyond American lands to which they cannot truly belong. What’s more, the preacher’s message acknowledges that this third land is not only eschatological, but also can become a reality even in this new land; that is, such preaching envisages hostile American lands being transformed into the Promised Land or the postcolonial Third Space of *perichoresis* as Sarah Travis would call.⁴⁷ The pilgrim preacher calls all Asian Americans to be active agents of this grand promise of God. They *are* indeed already agents of transformation because from the very beginning Asians have been called to the promise of the Promised Land just like Abraham and Sarah were. The preacher’s important task is to remind the people of this sacred calling, which serves as their core self-identity in the new land—namely, that of the transformative pilgrim.

Finally, as explicitly indicated along the way, the Asian American preacher of the promise (of the Promised Land) carries in and out of herself the homiletic image of the *fellow pilgrim*. The typical images of the preacher as herald, pastor, poet/storyteller, and witness⁴⁸ do not seem to do full justice to the homiletic-spiritual nature of the Asian American preacher. The conventional four images of the preacher are all good at describing specific characteristics of the individual preacher, depending on the preacher’s own personality or spiritual formation. But they do not have enough concern for the preacher’s particular socio-ecclesial context, the place and community out of which the preacher arises. Given the foundational theological ethos of pilgrimage in Asian American ecclesia, no image delineates the Asian American preacher as well as does that of pilgrim.

⁴⁷ Relying on the Moltmannian-Trinitarian concept of *perichoresis*, Sarah Travis is convinced that postcolonial preaching creates the liberative and reconciliatory perichoretic space in the midst of the exclusive, oppressing colonial social milieu. According to Moltmann, *perichoresis* is “a movement from one to another to reach round and go around, to surround, embrace, and encompass.” The Persons of the Trinity within and through this cooperative and mutual inner movement creates spaces for one another’s different existence and move in perfect harmony. Travis proposes the social-Trinitarian application of *perichoresis* in postcolonial preaching that will eventually help transform the colonial social space of exclusivity and hostility into the boundless space of mutual inclusivity and hospitality. This perichoretic-Trinitarian thought of the harmonious social space finds a great affinity with the Asian American postcolonial yearning for the Promised Land or the Third Land. Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: Decolonizing Preaching the Pulpit As Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, OR : Cascade Books, 2014), 60-63; Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 156.

⁴⁸ Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 19-51. Briefly defined, *the herald* (or *the prophet*) is the authority figure who receives directly from God and brings down straight to the people the very Word of God, while *the pastor* is the one whose pastoral concerns over the people’s needs shapes the content of the sermon. *The storyteller/poet* is the preacher whose personal artistic or aesthetic telling of the biblical story stirs the people’s hearts and minds to an existential, revelatory experience. *The witness* seems to be the closest one to *the fellow pilgrim* in the sense that the witness also develops intimate ecclesiastical relationship with “the place and community out of which the preacher arises.” Yet, the witness shows a significant difference (from the fellow pilgrim) with his/her primary focus on sharing/preaching their own experiential testimony (what is seen and heard uniquely) about God’s Word and revelatory events.

Why then an emphatic addition of *fellow*—thus, *fellow pilgrim*? Because the main sermonic staple of the Asian American preacher is *collective stories* and the *communal witness* of God’s ongoing revelatory events within the community. The Asian American preacher is the one who shares the communal stories of the God-called pilgrims, experienced together on the shared pilgrim journey in the same wilderness. The preacher’s genuine authority does not rely on her own private or esoteric experience of God’s revelation, but primarily on her heart-felt participation in the common people’s everyday struggles of pilgrimage. Thus, Kim preaches:

My husband and I were in awe like the Israelites who were amazed when they first saw the manna in the wilderness, the layer of white flaky substance, covering the ground in great abundance. The manna from heaven, the divine gift! . . . Feeling the divine presence through the snow, I whispered to God “Thank you! Thank you, Lord! You are with us even in this wilderness [of America]!”⁴⁹

In this sermon, the preacher appears as a fellow pilgrim who knows exactly what it means and how it feels to live as a stranger in the wilderness and also who knows exactly how to interpret it from a pilgrim’s perspective. The preacher shares the same joy, agony, hopes, and prayers with her own people who are on the same pilgrim journey. The only difference is her unique role as the preacher, a trumpeter who is to proclaim the good news or the promise of God on behalf of all the other fellow pilgrims. In the sermon, the preacher and her fellow pilgrims have begun to taste the fruits the Promised Land of God already accomplished—the Grand Promise they have kept in their hearts since their faithful departure from Asia to the present day. And it is the same Promise they will carry into the future for the next generations of pilgrims from all ethnic groups.

VI. Conclusion

Asian Americans, having been uprooted from their original lands and living in a hostile foreign land, have developed triple consciousness as a socio-ecclesial coping mechanism, adding the third identifier of Christian pilgrim to their dual social identities of Asian and American. What essentially goes in tandem with the pilgrim identity is the promise of the Promised Land. This is not a tautology at all because Asian Americans believe that by the same call to be pilgrims they have inherited the Abrahamic promise, the original Promised Land faith, as their own promise. The Abrahamic promise has become their own promise issuing from the same God and the same call.

Above, I showed how the pilgrim preacher developed a homiletic of promise based on this pilgrim theology and spirituality of the Promised Land. At the core of such preachers’ sermonic message is the synthetic establishment of the Promised Land as being both this-earthly and other-worldly. Moving a step further from Augustine, Asian Americans have placed an equal emphasis on both, the former hostile foreign land being transformed into the latter as *promised* yet with an eschatological prospect. This is why their preaching is *proclamation* of promise, and not *pronouncement* of promise.⁵⁰ They preach something that

⁴⁹ Eunjoo Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 126.

⁵⁰ According to the dictionary, proclamation denotes saying things that are happening now or will happen by someone’s action or active involvement, while pronouncement refers to things that have already happened or are already determined to exist in certain ways. In short, proclamation is more present- and future-oriented whereas pronouncement more past- and present-oriented. See the terms “proclamation” and “pronouncement” at <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>.

is actively happening and will happen more in a great expectation.

If I were to end this essay right now, I might rightly be cautioned that the promise of the Promised Land ought not to be exploited by Asian Americans for their own sake alone. The same promise and its projected goals should be extended to all fellow pilgrims from all other racial-ethnic groups. Noting the caution, Kim again provides an insightful antidote in her sermon mentioned above:

We're pilgrims called by God
to continue struggling
until the day when all immigrant people,
not only [Asians] but also other ethnic groups [are welcomed].

The promise of God is for all, that is, all Whites, Blacks, Browns, Reds, etc., journeying together on and beyond the American soil as the shadow of the Ultimate Promised Land. Yet, Asian Americans know this shadow is as real as the Ultimate one. The Ultimate Promised Land is already here, joyfully proclaimed!