Your name: Jaesung Ryu
The title of your paper: Trauma and a Theology of Holy Saturday: Remembering and Mourning with WWII Comfort Women

What inspired you to pursue an advanced degree in theology?
What do you hope to do with your degree?

I was raised with very conservative Christian values. However, most of my teens was spent outside of church, where my social life revolved around a large university town in the 1990s—a space of public demonstration that calls for full liberation and social justice of South Korea. Ironically, this provided a strong sense of belonging, and at the same time instilled caution about the system that is unjustly institutionalized in Korean society. I was consciously and unconsciously taught about “social justice,” and deeply engaged in my growing interests in the social and even religious structures of oppression underneath, all around and across society.

Little by little, the very conservative church community that had felt safe and nurturing as a child started to feel like a “circled wagon” toward an open and very precocious, rather than troublesome, teenager I was growing into. I internalized the conflict between my conservative church community and my emerging liberal identity, which left me feeling out of place. I retreated, and I never talked about my feelings for fear of greater judgment and potential ostracization. I felt alone and lonely. For a long time, I was in constant prayer with God, straining to believe that this loneliness was not what God intended for me.

In university, I found some relief from the stifling pressure I was feeling in my conservative church, and I enjoyed being immersed in a different culture where there was more room to be myself. I majored in English Language and Literature and equipped myself with literary studies about Black Liberation, Native American, Feminism, and various subjects of legal, economic, and political rights in the mid-nineteenth to late twentieth century of America. Ultimately, I realized that my heart for social justice was not a coincidence but had been formed by God since my teenage self constantly prayed to God with his internal conflicts with conservative Christian values. After years of my undergraduate works, I started working with NGO and at-risk and homeless populations, which eventually led me to pursue seminary and ordained ministry.

Seminary was transformational. It was a huge demand on my time, energy, and relationships. I had to learn new ways of balance and self-discipline. I had to encounter my ego time and again, and the frustration of not knowing it all. I also had to be intentional about rigorous training in both philosophical analysis and theological interpretation.
Overall, my education was affirming. I held my own views of social justice academically and earned the respect of my professors and colleagues. In turn, I was strongly encouraged by the leadership and faculty of the Seoul Theological University to expand my academic work of social justice in theological studies at Candler School of Theology.

As a student of MTS program at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, I took advantage of all the opportunities and programs developed to help me achieve academically and grow spiritually. I was also encouraged to worship regularly and engaged in community with my fellow students who came from all walks of life, with different professional and academic experiences. Overall, my education was formative.

There were three MTS classes at Candler School of Theology significantly formative: *Black Theology and Ethics* (Dr. Noel Leo Erskine), *Christianity and Holocaust* (Dr. Timothy P. Jackson), and *Redeeming Memories: Cultural Memory, Christian Witness, and Social Genocide* (Dr. Nichole R. Phillips). As part of my spiritual growth and academic development at the intersection of theology and social justice, I had to encounter the phenomenological contexts of today's persecuted world time and again, and a number of previously silenced and submerged subalterns’ voices.

Especially as I listened to many voices of those who survive the Holocaust and other forms of violence, including racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and terrible genocide, I could not help but take issue with most theological discourse to date, which has gone without addressing the question of suffering that remains (i.e., trauma); without rendering moral discourses and practices towards demanding justice for survivors of traumatic events. Ultimately, I was led to carry out independent research and analysis about WWII comfort women (Japanese military's sex slaves) and learned how to see the world through the reflective, constructive lens of Holy Saturday, manifested in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s classic texts *Mysterium Paschale, Explorations in Theology* volume 4, and *Theo-Drama* volume 4 and 5, as well as David Lauber’s close reading and critical analysis of Karl Barth’s treatment of the descent into hell and its relation to his theology of the Atonement (David Lauber, 2004). At the heart of this reflective, constructive lens of Holy Saturday is the twofold picture of Holy Saturday: suffering remains, but love remains more—even at the place at which the channels of graceful future and hopeful healing are most threatened.

If I am given an opportunity to do a PhD program in theological studies with special attention to Holy Saturday, I will bring to PhD program my desire to lift up the need for an interdisciplinary approach and examining untapped theological resources for a constructive practical theology of trauma. Ultimately, I will create more space within the field of theology to speak about the role of God in providing hope and redemption for the traumatized.
Where do you see connections between your personal faith, your intellectual work and the other aspects of your life?

I have a lovely wife. I love her, and she taught me a sense of hope; hope is pure; hope is beautiful; hope is innocent; hope is a touching eulogy of life. In hope, all of my life seemed going to be well. Thus, the comedy of hope slowly yet compactly encroached on my personal faith. However, this fairy tale failed to expand its territory on my personal faith when a tragedy came to my wife.

It was during my formative time at Candler School of Theology my wife suffered the horrible side-effects of antibiotics. She missed a proper, immediate health care due to unaffordable costs. In fact, the health insurance plan we had in the states was only able to cover one-sixth of costs. Additionally, she had to go through needless suffering due to misdiagnosis and faulty medical practices. In turn, her condition became serious. Further, it became almost irrevocable on our long way to Korea for medical treatment. This long, traumatic journey to Korea left inexpugnable wounds on her body and internal organs as well as my trust in hope and the medical profession. This wounding of naivete and trust went deep and begged the question of “why?” in a way that any suffering, but especially undeserved or what is often called as “unmerited” suffering, raises fundamental questions about life, meaning, and hope.

Why was there such suffering? Hope should never fail, but it no longer plays in my life as a pure comedy because her body will not relinquish but hold the “inexpugnable” wound that shows that the stories of healing and transformation most often told in our lives by Christian traditions do not guarantee a comedic “Hollywood ending.” Ever since that day, I’ve been less quick to read hope and redemption in a linear fashion in which life is victorious over-and-against death.

Then, how do I maintain a vision of hope and redemption without a prior assumption that the vision will be necessarily realized in the present? How do I live for the ministry without guarantees of success or progress? What would be my view of healing and transformation if I pay attention to the “inexpugnable” wounds? My personal story raises heavy questions, pose a significant challenge to my intellectual work, and ultimately require me of finding different answers in responding to the question of a suffering that does not stay in the past but invades the present and offers an antithesis to a familiar saying: time heals all wounds. To be honest, there’s no fixed answer to this question, only the assurance that my passion and research in my intellectual work will raise to the surface the significance of a suffering that is not over yet and how one finds hope and redemption in the midst of that suffering.

How would you summarize your paper for someone without a theological background?

What is hope? How is one able to develop his or her capacity to hope? Projecting oneself into the future dimension by developing one’s trusting anticipation of the future is a natural process, but what gives hopeful content and tone to his or her trusting anticipation of the future?
Development of anticipatory consciousness comes early in life. We are very young when we begin looking into an open-ended future through considering possibilities. We fill this future dimension with content based on previous experience but creatively enhanced and formed by our basic assumptions about the world: the world is benevolent and embraces a meaningful and coherent whole and not a basket of uncertainties. Our basic assumptions are the foundations for our anticipations of the future and, therefore, our hope.

In the case of traumatization, however, all these basic assumptions are completely shattered. We lose the foundations for our hope. Thus, we can commonly find a sense of stress and despair in traumatized people. Trauma damages their sense of hope. Intensive anxieties such as feelings of shame, fear of judgment, and extreme vulnerability continue to haunt their lives and capacities to hope. Trusting anticipation of the future cannot easily be reestablished. That is understandable because the traumatized often fail to embrace the mystery and excitement of open-ended future and the not-yet.

Maybe, we need time and patience. Given the profound losses and the ongoing effects of trauma that the traumatized have suffered, it is obvious that one must be patient and wait until the traumatized are ready to be healed. The rush to move forward does nothing to bring hope. Rebuilding the basic assumptions that serve as the basis of our hope is a slow and repetitive task. In this sense, trauma scholars and specialists are always told of deliberately slowing down the process, patiently enduring its slowness, and always waiting the survivor’s autonomous or voluntary participation, while remembering the maxim that “the slower you go, the faster you get there.”

Where can we find such an “enduring” or “waiting” community, instead of one that is “demanding” or “pushing” for immediate healing? In the twofold picture of Holy Saturday that I have described in the essay Trauma and a Theology of Holy Saturday: Remembering and Mourning with WWII Comfort Women, one may see the “enduring” or “waiting” community is eventuated through the Son who patiently endures what persists between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Instead of rushing to the hopeful promise of all shall be well, the Son of God empties himself to fully embrace authentic elements of human physical and spiritual death and enables the dead, the forsaken, the hopeless to have communion with the one who is intrinsically love. While this “enduring” or “waiting” relationship needs further development, the scholarship and cooperation of contemporary theologians and trauma theorists demonstrates its theoretical feasibility and practical usefulness. A helpful example supporting its value but needs further study and development is also given by the essay I have written with the title Trauma and a Theology of Holy Saturday: the Comfort Station Survivor’s Wednesday Protests in South Korea.

How might this award make a difference in your life?

I am pleased and truly blessed to be the 2015 recipient of the Goodwin Prize award. It has further encouraged me to continue to live out the core values of Holy Saturday theology and to integrate them to my professional practice as an articulate, informed, research-minded theologian with a practical-theoretical focus. Winning this Goodwin Prize award will alleviate some of the financial burden that my ongoing studies have placed on my family, allowing me to concentrate on my academic goals of developing my career to new heights and lifting up the need for an interdisciplinary approach and examining
untapped theological resources for a constructive practical theology of trauma. Thank you
to the board of directors of Theological Horizons for recognizing my dedication to
consciously live out the core values of Holy Saturday theology in my life. I am looking
forward to the opportunities that the Theological Horizons has opened up for me and the
ways that I can begin to contribute back to the community.

What would you say to prospective donors might fund the Goodwin Writing Prize?

It is amazing to see how many prospective donors have contributed to the Goodwin
Writing Prize. With so many deserving candidates, I am truly honored to receive the
Goodwin Writing Prize, and am pleased to represent the Candler School of Theology in
Emory University. This prize not only reflects my personal commitment to the community
of faith, but also the support of my family and academic mentors. As such, it will continue to
represent a big help in reaching the core values of Theological Horizons and bring in the
near future so much joy and meaningful supports to many other young scholars of promise
and commitment. I have no doubt that a financial gift from you has allowed many
seminarians to progress further in continuing to achieve greater heights in their academic
studies and future work careers. Your gift will feed them for a reasonable length of time
and allow them to transform lives and build brighter futures in the field of theology as well
as the church and our larger society. Thank you so much for your support!

Sincerely
Rev. Jaesung Ryu

How do you spend your time when you are not studying?

I am a young parent struggling with the challenges of raising a young toddler and
juggling my marriage as well as career. If I do have an opportunity to spend my time when I
am not studying, I have no choice but temporarily care my daughter and my pregnant wife
at home. I usually start my early day to the sound of a toddler belting out “Mommy! Daddy!”
while impatiently rattling the bars of her crib. My daughter usually wakes up at 5:00 AM,
crying loudly for fruit pouches, honey almond cereals, and her favorite Organic, Vitamin D
included milks, which I am not allowed to drink: “It’s only for my daughter,” my wife said.
Before I can clear my sleep-bleary eyes, I am tripping over toys and getting her pouches,
cereals, and milks. I am lucky if I get a shower before I go to work or school. It is almost
impossible for me to spend a quiet, meaningful hour in prayer and Bible study.
Certainly, my life is jam packed with things about family, hospital, church, and
school. Spending spiritual time with God in this context may not always look the way I
believe it should, but it can happen. So I have to find a way that enables me to continue my
spiritual journey with God when I am not studying. I hope that even small chunks of time
with the Lord here and there can add up to meaningful spiritual growth.
Any other comments?

I am a 32 year old Korean Christian pastor, married, and expecting my second child in the next couple months. I graduated from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University with a MTS in May 2015. I completed one unit of ACPE CPE and was accepted into the Emory University Hospital Spiritual Health Residency Program July 2015-July 2016. I was ordained at the end of April, 2015 in my denomination Korean Evangelical Holiness Church (KEHC)—which has two particular features: the England Puritan tradition in terms of advocating greater purity of worship (ritual) and the Wesleyan-Holiness evangelical tradition that explores how to address contemporary social issues and appears winsome to a post-modern world; and served until recently as an associate pastor at a local Korean American Church, the Servant Korean Evangelical Church of Atlanta.