

진실로 너희에게 이르노니 너희
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저희를
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있느니라.

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마태복음 Matthew 18: 19-20

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (NRSV)

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The New Homiletic: The Strategies for the Listener-Oriented Communication of the Gospel in the Postmodern Korean Context

Ung Joe Lee, Ph. D. Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 2006

Summary

As the Korean Church collectively reached stagnation in its growth at the turn of 21st century, the target of the question to find its reason became the sermon, the very thing stimulating the rapid growth of the Korean Church. Dr. Ung Joe Lee's dissertation, *The New Homiletic: The Strategies for the Listener-Oriented Communication of the Gospel in the Postmodern Korean Context*, is also an attempt to determine why traditional Korean preaching does not appeal to the people of today and to seek a new homiletic for the new generation. "Why does traditional Korean preaching not draw the hearts of people?" "What is a proper preaching form or homiletic method for the new Korean generation?" This is the starting point of his work. His answer for the first question is postmodernism, and the second is the Listener-Oriented Preaching.

Dr. Lee traces back that preaching has been considered a speaker-oriented discipline since the Reformation. The ancient rhetoric of Aristotle and Cicero, emphasizing persuasive explanation of revealed truth, was revived by Renaissance humanism. As 20th century dawns, the issue of style or delivery in preaching had been stripped away from discussions of preaching, because Reformed theologians, such as Karl Barth, focused on divine revelation but strongly rejected the work of humans in preaching. However, contemporary homileticians, such as Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, and David Buttrick, turned the focus of preaching again to rhetoric and listener. In the light of a new homiletic, Dr. Lee seeks to find effective and relevant styles of preaching for contemporary Koreans with their unique historical, social, and cultural context.¹

In the first chapter, as a foundation for what follows, Dr. Lee establishes the biblical and theological foundations for preaching to a new postmodern Korean congregation. From his point of view, we need to learn Jesus' sensitivity to listeners and his dialectical attitude in sharing the message, using familiar objects in his teaching to draw people into the conversation and, ultimately, the message. In preaching, not only the preacher but also the listeners should encounter Jesus and be led to transformation in their individual and social dimensions. In other words, reflective and purposeful actions should follow after preaching and the accompanying encounter with Christ. This is the Christopraxis preaching we have to seek.

In the second chapter, Dr. Lee's investigation focuses on Korean traditional religions—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism—which are the backbone of the Korean Church as well as Korean culture. Confucianism, with its hierarchal view toward society led the Korean Church to misunderstand the roles of elder and deacon within the church, not as positions of service but of authority. The preacher became an authoritative figure in the church and the larger culture. However, authoritative and deductive preaching style caused anguish and pain to younger generations, since they do not willingly accept either the preacher's message or authority. Buddhist doctrines, such as incarnation and sacrifice of bodhisattvas, helped Koreans understand the work of Christ and, ultimately, Christianity. Especially, Zen Buddhism's concept of no past or future influenced Korean Christianity to place a strong emphasis on blessing (*bok*). Koreans could find a hope in Christianity, because suffering, the central message of Buddhism, could be overcome in the promise of blessing. Shamanism, in which ancestral spirits guide and give blessings to the living, helped Koreans accept the existence of the Holy Spirit. This is why Koreans highly emphasize the power of the Spirit in worship and often ask for their pastor to have spiritual power to heal the sick.

In the third chapter, Dr. Lee studies socio-political events that had huge influences on Korean congregations. Because of the invasion of Japan, the Korean War, and the present division of the nation, Korea has been called the nation of *han*, which means an inactive resentment. However, in recent years Korean society has experienced huge changes through rapid economic growth, Westernization, globalization, and urbanization. Consumerism, which emerged with the rapid economic growth, yielded a selfish generation, and advanced technology made them focus on quick pleasure rather than the harvest of endurance. In addition, Korean

society is being especially influenced by the rise of postmodernism. Traditional authority and objective truth are being questioned by the resurgence of individualism and subjectivism. What is at stake are not traditional values but individual decisions. For all these reasons, many Korean churchgoers no longer remain in the denomination in which they grew up; instead, they in a sense “shop” for a church that they want to join and seek a spirituality that is experiential. Preachers should consider these contexts in preaching, because these are the contexts in which the listeners live and hear the messages.

In the fourth chapter, Dr. Lee turns to the development of Western homiletic theory. In the West, the Christian sermon has its roots in the ancient Greek rhetoric of persuasion, although its contents are based on Jewish and rabbinic tradition. The great fathers of rhetoric, Aristotle and Cicero, especially emphasized *ethos*, the character of the speaker, because the speaker’s character affects what is spoken. On the contrary, the Old Testament emphasizes the power of the spoken word, because what is proclaimed is the word of *God*. New Testament rhetoric appeals not only to the character of speaker, such as Jesus and Paul, but also to the message that is preached: the gospel. Furthermore, in the New Testament, the listener becomes an important issue in rhetoric, as Paul admits that he changed his message for different listeners.² Apostolic fathers like St. Augustine often used ancient rhetoric to explain Christian faith, and Reformers also tried to blend classical Greek rhetoric with the proclamation of the gospel. However, during the era of the Enlightenment and the advent of liberal theology in Europe, preaching was reduced to a purely human performance; in protest Karl Barth argued that what is important in preaching is neither the preacher nor the audience, but the Word of God. For him rhetorical issues or skills were not merely secondary but should be eliminated to reveal the genuine power of the gospel. Even though his theology caused deep conflict with Emil Brunner’s emphasis on the act of the human in preaching, Barth’s influence was huge in theology and, especially, in homiletics, until the New Homiletic came onto the scene in the 1970s. As traditional authority and order began to be questioned during the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, postmodernism began to dominate North American society, and the pulpit became a place for public disfavor and ridicule. In this circumstance, a New Homiletic seeking to create an experience of the gospel rather than to simply convey information was developed by Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, David Buttrick, and others.

In the fifth chapter, Dr. Lee overviews Korean preaching styles and content by studying the nation's Christian experience. Korean preaching was initially authoritative and deductive in style and moralistic in content, because the first Western Protestant missionaries to Korea, such as Horace G. Underwood, theologically were Puritans emphasizing morality in life, and "the Puritan morality was well matched to that of Confucianism."³ Furthermore, Korean preaching developed a charismatic style, stimulating listeners' emotions by using an informal narrative style. The Great Revival Movement of 1907, which swept the entire Korean peninsula, was led by great revival preachers, such as Sun-Joo Kil. During the Japanese imperialism, Christianity played a significant role in the national resistance; for instance, the March First Movement of 1919 was led mainly by Christian leaders. In terms of content, suffering and the transcendence of present suffering through Jesus became a central theme of Korean preaching in this era. As Japanese persecution of Christians became severe with the imposition of Shinto shrine worship in the 1930s, a prophetic preaching style evolved in Korea. Many preachers boldly stood up and preached the gospel and their faith. From the 1950s through the 1970s, following the Korean War, a message of hope with material blessing was dominant in Korean churches, as industrialism occurred in Korea. Especially in this era, conservative urban churches, geared toward deductive, biblical/doctrinal preaching and emphasizing the manifestation of the Spirit in preaching, were growing rapidly.

In the sixth chapter, the author explores the listener-oriented preaching theories of Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry and David Buttrick. Because the historical-critical method failed to consider the context of the listener and to take into account the reactions of the listener, a Listener-Oriented Preaching (LOP) developed under the influence of the New Hermeneutic and the New Literary Criticism. In LOP, preaching does not simply deliver information but creates reality, and an important element to consider in preaching is the reader of biblical stories, as well as the author and the text. This change was actually stirred by changes in the context of American churches in the 1960s and 1970s. In this period, American churches first began experiencing membership declines and tried to find new ways of communicating the gospel. With the advancement of mass media, especially TV, Americans became familiar with an inductive approach to communication. Traditional authority was questioned by the rise of postmodernism. Therefore, the authority of the preacher and the deductive method of preaching

no longer appealed to the people in this era. As a result, in the 1960s and 1970s, the paradigm of preaching shifted from preacher-based communication to a listener-based one.⁴

The most significant figure in this movement is Fred B. Craddock, whose method is called *inductive preaching*: “beginning with an interpretation of human existence today and then moving to the text.”⁵ According to Craddock, what is at stake in preaching is not the information presented, but the experiences that are communicated. Through active participation, listeners can identify with the characters of the text or stories shared in preaching and can apply the story’s conclusion to their own experiences. The work of a sermon is not just transferring information but enabling listeners to appropriate and experience the message and solve their own problem.⁶

Eugene Lowry’s method is *narrative preaching*: it employs the narrative sequence of opening conflict, escalation, reversal, and proleptic closure with the glue of ambiguity—upsetting the disequilibrium (**Oops**), analyzing the discrepancy (**Ugh**), disclosing clues to a resolution (**Ah**), experiencing practical aspects of the gospel (**Whee**), and anticipating the consequences (**Yeah**).⁷ Through this homiletical plot, a sermon becomes “an event-in-time—existing in time, not space—a process and not a collection of parts.”⁸ In other words, the sermon becomes God’s time for breaking into human history. As a result, listeners are prompted to act upon what is heard in the preaching.

Lastly, David Buttrick’s method is a *motion-picture strategy*. For him, biblical texts are not still-life pictures. Rather, they are clips from motion pictures, having movement inside the story, because from his point of view, biblical language is figurative and poetic rather than rational and objective. Sermons are plotted scenarios from introduction to closure; by selecting the segments to be viewed, and by narrowing down or widening the focus, preachers like photographers can form a congregation’s faith-consciousness. To create images in preaching, Buttrick prefers to use real-life illustrations and examples. By putting words and images together, preachers can help listeners build a world of faith. In short, these three leaders of Listener-Oriented Preaching mainly address *how* to communicate rather than *what* to communicate in preaching; they try to create interactive human experience through a sermon.

In the seventh chapter, Dr. Lee investigates contemporary developments in homiletics. Craddock, Lowry, and Buttrick oppose traditional preaching, which is rational, authoritative, and deductive. They favor inductive preaching. By nature, inductive preaching is experience-oriented,

flexible, and intuitive, and in its style, narrative. In addition to the development of Listener-Oriented Preaching, other developments of homiletics are centered in the context of preaching. Liturgical preaching mixes biblical narrative with visual images and imagination. Culturally oriented preaching pays close attention to listeners and their cultures. Postmodern preaching tries to proclaim the Christian gospel, the story of ultimate truth, in a world in which people no longer recognize ultimate truth.⁹ Storytelling preaching is composed of stories rather than propositional statements.¹⁰ All these methods of preaching, including storytelling preaching, will continue to evolve and change, as the context in which the gospel is preached changes.

In the eighth chapter, Dr. Lee finally reaches the point—applying strategies of Listener-Oriented Preaching to postmodern Korean congregations. He argues that the message preached should be theocentric, focusing on what God has done for us before focusing on what we must do in response. The language of preaching should be imaginative, because “in the postmodern world, the image is the primary unit of value,”¹¹ and because Jesus also used imaginative language which listeners could relate to their own experience. Such imaginative language creates images in our minds which stick in our memory. Preachers should use these kinds of effective images to hold the attention of listeners and to plant biblical ideas, because the postmodern generation has already been bombarded with images from mass media. The essential keys of preaching should be creativity and variety, because the postmodern generation is accustomed to the quick scene changes of movies or television which take only 3.7 seconds. Preachers need creativity and variety in every aspect of their preaching to attract listeners’ attention: “pitch or inflection, volume, intensity, pause, gestures, sermon outline, as well as approach.”¹² Drama and music can be used to create experiential encounters. Authentic personal illustration can be used to build genuine communication with listeners. A mono-mythic cycle can be used to reflect the human mind through the story and to attract people’s minds. Media and current issues can be used to overcome the bias and alienation in segments of the media-saturated congregation. Slogans of commercials or major sports events or major news events, properly evaluated, can support the message of the gospel. Participatory questions can also be used to create closeness and identification, as well as to create spontaneity in the congregation.

In the light of his analysis, Dr. Lee concludes that the storytelling method of preaching will work well for the postmodern Korean generation, because what mass media encourages

through its multi-sensory presentation is the very thing that stories do: create an experiential encounter with information. Preachers can put good stories, which contain emotional appeal, in their sermons to support the key elements of a sermon, or they can create a sermon that is a single story. By using the story, preachers can preach to the postmodern generation not the story itself but what is inside of the story, the gospel.

Evaluation

Dr. Lee's dissertation, *The New Homiletic: The Strategies for the Listener-Oriented Communication of the Gospel in the Postmodern Korean Context*, has three valuable points we need to remember. First, Dr. Lee reviews the practical issues of the Korean Church and tries to solve them by understanding the society in which congregations find themselves. The starting point of his work is not mere assumptions about the Korean Church or Korean church history but a clear diagnosis of the present situation of the Korean Church: the church has reached stagnation in its growth, and the stagnation is largely the result of the ineffectiveness of traditional Korean preaching in the postmodern context. He never allows the past, such as historical events or figures, to be at the center of the discussion and to solve the present-day issues. The present and its practical issues are always at the center of discussion. For example, "How do generational differences influence the meaning in the message [in the postmodern Korean context]?" "What about the very nature of a shared language in an age of rapidly expanding technology and cultural pluralism?"¹³

Furthermore, in finding solutions to the failures of current preaching, he does not limit the scope of his investigation to the inside of the church. Rather, he turns his eyes to the society in which the congregation is living, and searches what makes the consciousness of the Korean congregation of our time. For example, what influences today's congregation most in their communication skills is mass media. To allow preachers to understand the effects of mass media on their congregations, Dr. Lee even searches and reveals that "in light of the fact that movies or television programs average a scene change or camera angle change every 3.7 seconds, the preacher should keep the sermon moving as well."¹⁴ Preachers need to understand what practical issues of the people of this time are and apply them not just for igniting their interest and

drawing more people to the church but for truly allowing them to have an opportunity to hear the gospel in their way.

Second, Dr. Lee puts the congregation in the center of theological discussion in the Korean Church. Historically in the Korean Church, pastors, preachers, and scholars have been at the center of theological debate. For example, Eun Chul Kim's dissertation, *Preaching in the Korean Protestant Church (1884-1945): A Study in Light of John Calvin's Understanding of Word and Sacrament*, is centered on how *preachers* can combine Calvin's theology of Word and Sacrament in preaching.¹⁵ Likewise, in Korean churches, the congregation has been the last object or often missed out in considering preaching, while the word being preached and the preacher have been at the center of the preaching. Especially, this tendency has been enforced by Korean culture which is hugely influenced by Confucianism. The preacher is an authoritative figure like a moral teacher to whom listeners should listen and obey. That is why, when Koreans call the word of preacher the word of God, they mean every word of it. In Korean churches, there is a word calling pastors and preachers. That is *Joo Eue Jong*, which means the servant of God. However, what happens in Korean churches is that preachers and pastors do not want to be the servant of people, while they want to be the servant of God. Jung Young Lee says from his experience: "they [Korean preachers] thought of themselves as the heads of their congregations. They said that they would feel disgraced to have to think of themselves as servants of the people."¹⁶ In other words, they are often masters of the church and of the congregation, even though they are servants of God. Congregations are, from their point of view, passive listeners.

In contrast, Dr. Lee's main concern is the congregation. What needs to be changed most is neither the essence of preaching, gospel, nor the listener of preaching, the congregation, but the deliverer of the gospel, the preacher. Listeners are changing. Therefore, preachers need to change how they deliver the gospel, which is the unchanging essence of Christian message. In other words, what is at stake in preaching of our time is not the speaker but the listener. That is why Dr. Lee focuses on the *Listener-Oriented Preaching* of Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, and David Buttrick.

Although Dr. Lee's dissertation has the strengths listed above, however, there are still some weaknesses which need to be considered. First, his investigation does not focus on Korean elements, although he starts and finishes his work by asking "How do we preach effectively to

the Korean postmodern generation?”¹⁷ He successfully identifies those features of postmodern society which most affect the consciousness of the congregation, such as a tendency to challenge traditional authority and a short attention span, caused mainly by the rapid changes in mass media productions. But he fails to present what particularly defines Koreanness in a postmodern Korean context. Even though he points out some characteristics of current Korean society, such as church shopping and advanced technology, we see these things in other postmodern societies as well as American society.

In other words, he does not fully prescribe medicine for the postmodern Korean Church. He prescribes medicine for postmodernism: using storytelling in preaching. However, he is so concerned about the postmodern context that he forgets the particular Korean context. For example, in chapter 8 he tries to show how to apply “Christopraxis preaching through storytelling to engage a postmodern Korean congregation.”¹⁸ However, he only talks about how to use certain tools in preaching, such as imaginative language, drama, and music; he barely talks about how these methods can be incorporated in the Korean context. Even in the conclusion of his work, he does not explain how preachers prepare themselves for the Koreanness of their congregation. He only gives tips for the postmodern aspect of their congregation.

Second, Dr. Lee’s research is limited to stories that attract the consciousness of the postmodern generation. He never talks about the stories that attract the consciousness of Korean congregations of our time. Even in the final chapter, he only focuses on where to put and how to use the story in preaching. He seems concerned about the contents of the story: stories should be interesting and engaging in nature. But, the stories that he talks about are general stories that can apply to every congregation; these stories do not address the uniqueness of Korean congregations. But, if the story told cannot be related to the story of the congregation, no matter how much skill we develop in storytelling, the sermon will become pointless. Listeners can laugh, cry, and even be moved. But the message will never sustain their life, because the story that is preached is not their story. Dr. Lee might notice this point: the story has to have relevance for the life of the congregation. But, he fails to see that the stories told should be their stories, Korean stories, in order for them to take root in the hearts of the Korean congregation.

Third, Dr. Lee often confuses the word “believe” with “think.” Sometimes, he uses the word “believe” to appeal to readers: “I believe that authentic preaching cannot dismiss the

historical or cultural context of the text.”¹⁹ “I believe the storytelling format of the Bible is divinely intentional.”²⁰ However, in these cases he should have used “think” rather than “believe,” because the word, “believe,” often misses the logical progression in a given conversation. When someone says “I believe” there can be no more debate, because that is where the speaker puts his or her own trust. Whether the argument is logically right or wrong, that is not the point. Even if the argument is logically wrong and it is impossible to prove, it does not really matter. One can draw a conclusion without proving the argument by saying “I believe,” just as someone can say “I believe that God exists” even though that person is not able to prove the existence of God logically.

However, this is not acceptable in academic discussion. Without supporting materials, one cannot argue and get into a discussion on certain issues. That is why people engaged in academic debate use the word, “think” rather than “believe.” Even though in many cases Dr. Lee supports his belief with evidence, it is still inappropriate to say “I believe.”²¹ It weakens his argument. In other words, the solidity and, ultimately, the validity of his work are weakened because of the use of the word, “believe.”

Assessment

There are two things we can learn from Dr. Lee’s work for our context, the Korean/Korean-American church context. First, what is at stake in preaching is how to preach rather than what to preach. In other words, it is more important in preaching to enable the congregation to hear the truth rather than to simply speak the truth to them. Fred Craddock noted in his memorable book, *Overhearing the Gospel*: “Our task is not just to say the word and to tell the truth, but to get the truth heard, to effect a new hearing of the word among those who have been repeatedly exposed to it.”²² However, in the Korean Church both in Korea and the United States, until now telling the truth has received the most emphasis. Whether the congregation understands the truth has been secondary. But, truth not heard is pointless and a waste of time for the preacher as well as for the congregation.

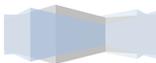
Especially, in Korean-American churches, the culture of a 1st generation Korean congregation is different from that of a 1.5 point generation or 2nd generation church. The latter do not like traditional Korean preaching, which is authoritative in nature and deductive in style.

Therefore, in the joint worship service in Korean-American churches, they shut their ears and do not listen to the message, even though they can hear and understand Korean. What is at stake is not just language but culture. What is at stake is not just what is preached, but how it is preached. The message should be delivered appropriately for the culture in which it is preached.

Second, the point of preaching is encounter with God. Listener-Oriented Preaching tries not only to have the message heard but also to enable the listeners to meet the God who is presented in the message. The reason why the manner of preaching is so important is because where there is an effective delivery of the message, there is an encounter with God. If there is no encounter with God, the message is a lecture, not a sermon. If there is no meeting with God, the message is not the word of God but the word of the preacher.

The postmodern generation wants to experience an encounter with God. They do not lack spirituality.²³ Rather, they are starving for spiritual food. This is why the New Age movement has so much appeal to them. What postmoderns want is to have an encounter with the ultimate and that is what God too longs for. In this sense, postmodernism is not only a crisis but also an opportunity for the preaching of the gospel. We need to invite postmoderns to meet with God and to allow their hearts to be touched by God in preaching.

Traditional propositional preaching, however, cannot touch their hearts and, ultimately, their lives, even though it might be able to influence their thinking. In postmodern society, people do things not because they know that it is the right thing to do but because, in a deep sense, they simply feel like doing it. What needs to happen are changes of heart and changes of lives. These can happen only through encounters with God. Enabling these encounters is the task of the preaching and the call of preacher.



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¹ Ung Joe Lee, *The New Homiletic: The Strategies for the Listener-Oriented Communication of the Gospel in the Postmodern Korean Context*, 11.

² *Ibid.*, 85.

³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁹ Dr. Lee presents in his dissertation Rodney Clapp's *Faith Narrative*, Graham Johnston's *Dialogical Approach*, and John McClure's *Round-Table Pulpit*, as attempts to preach the gospel in postmodern world. For detail, see Ung Joe Lee, *The New Homiletic: The Strategies for the Listener-Oriented Communication of the Gospel in the Postmodern Korean Context*, 185-189.

¹⁰ Dr. Lee presents in his dissertation Grady Davis's *Form of Story Told*, Charles Rice's *Contemporary Literature*, Richard Jensen's *Story Sermon*, Paul Scott Wilson's *Four-Paged Sermon*, Stephen Farris' *Movement*, Lucy Rose's *Conversational Preaching*. For detail, see Ung Joe Lee, *The New Homiletic: The Strategies for the Listener-Oriented Communication of the Gospel in the Postmodern Korean Context*, 190-195.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹² *Ibid.*, 204.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁵ Eun Chul Kim, *Preaching in the Korean Protestant Church (1884-1945): A Study in Light of John Calvin's Understanding of Word and Sacrament*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. New Jersey, Madison, Drew University, 2001.

¹⁶ Jung Young Lee, *Korean Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 96.

¹⁷ Ung Joe Lee, *The New Homiletic: The Strategies for the Listener-Oriented Communication of the Gospel in the Postmodern Korean Context*, 222. In the statement of purpose of the study, Dr. Lee also says that “The purpose of this study is to examine effective and relevant styles of preaching that may engage a spiritually disenchanting generation of contemporary Koreans, within their unique historical, social, and cultural context.” *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 197-222.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

²¹ For example, he says “I believe the storytelling format of the Bible is divinely intentional, *because* the format is able to reach the consciousness and heart of all people regardless of their ethnicity, cultural background or even place in humanity’s history.” *Ibid.*, 219.

²² Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2002), 11.

²³ Ung Joe Lee, *The New Homiletic: The Strategies for the Listener-Oriented Communication of the Gospel in the Postmodern Korean Context*, 71-72: “the Korean postmodern generation is searching for answers to spiritual issues and concerns, as are most young people around the world.”

