

## CHAPTER 5 INFERENCE

### 5.1 Reflection and conclusion

This thesis was initiated in view of the need for research on preaching in the interaction between church and culture. It is based on my own conviction that all church-related work, especially preaching, should be done in the understanding of church culture. The Korean church, famous for her rapid growth, has begun to notice a downward trend in her growth rate since the mid-eighties. Although many reputable investigations have recently been carried out with regard to this downward slide, these investigations have overlooked the full meaning of preaching in the interaction between church and culture.

In view of this, this study sets the following four aims: (1) to investigate the reasons behind church decline in terms of preaching in the interaction between church and culture in Korea; (2) to interpret preaching in the interaction between church and culture biblically, historically and theologically in order to understand the normative Christian perceptions and practices of preaching; (3) to attempt a critical synthesis and comparative integration between understanding preaching in the specific situation in Korea and understanding preaching in the Christian normative sources; and 4) to propose developmental strategies for the Korean church.

To achieve these purposes, Chapter 2 (Interaction) as a descriptive practical theology (Browning 1991:48), examined the present ecclesiology. The interaction between the church and culture, and the present preaching theory with regard to this interaction, was described critically, as well as the manner in which these relate to the problem of the Korean church. As a result, it was first found that the Korean church has been very hierarchical and mystical. The main type of Korean ecclesiology was found to be *the church as herald*, which places

the preacher and preaching in the center of the church practices. The empirical interpretation of the interaction between church and culture (2.2.5) secured relevance to such findings and suggested a solid and healthy ecclesiology for the Korean church. Secondly, it was also found that the Korean pulpit has been ignoring cultural changes and trends. This has resulted in lack of diverse delivery methods, lack of hermeneutical balance between text and context, lack of congregational studies, lack of conversion preaching, lack of communal conversion, lack of correlation between worship, preaching, teaching, and sacrament, etc. These findings proved to be relevant through the empirical interpretation of preaching in the interaction between church and culture (2.3.3).

Five claims emerged from these findings and were integrated with the normative Christian themes in Chapter 3 and developed in Chapter 4: (1) Context of preaching: How do we reset the context of preaching? (2) Preaching theory: How do we revise the present preaching theory of the Korean church? (3) Conversion preaching: How do we define and defend conversion preaching that is seemingly exclusive in contemporary pluralistic Korean society? (4) Ecclesiology: How do we rethink and re-establish the ecclesiology of the Korean church? (5) Christian culture: How do we formulate the Christian culture against or in the rage of worldly thoughts and cultures in Korea?

To identify the normative Christian themes, Chapter 3 (Interpretation) as a historical practical theology (Browning 1991:49) attempted multi-interpretations of preaching in the interaction between church and culture. These were biblical, historical and theological interpretations based on classic sources and contemporary Christian thoughts. From a biblical interpretation (3.2), it was found, first, that there is no distinction between missionary (conversion) preaching and congregational preaching. Secondly, biblical studies have made it clear that human cultures have played a significant role in biblical history and that God had indeed spoken through Moses, the subsequent prophets and biblical writers in the context of the surrounding cultures. A historical interpretation (3.3) obviously revealed that preaching, especially in its form,

tends to shift like the swing of the pendulum between two extremes, such as reason, knowledge and dogma on the one side (text) and experience, passion and emotion on the other side (context). A theological interpretation (3.4) defined the basic role of preaching and some criteria for its effective practice, both in church and culture. From this, it was found that (1) theology has a central role in preaching; (2) preaching the Word of God is the primary task of the church and of the Christian pastor; (3) preaching is empowered by God and the church is subservient to it; and (4) interaction between church and culture affects preaching.

Above all, all three interpretations can be concluded with the same point of emphasis that culture exercised/is exercising a massive influence and challenge on biblical writing, biblical history, the church, her theology (especially ecclesiology), her practice (especially preaching), and Christian culture. At the same time all three interpretations emphasized the same conviction that there is the never-changing fact in ever-changing culture that preaching is the primary task of the church. Preaching is empowered by God for converting people to Christ.

This study then progressed to attempt *Integration* (the first part of Chapter 4) and a systematic practical theology (Browning 1991:51) with the aim of fusing the horizons between the five claims that emerged out of the contemporary practices of preaching (Chapter 2), and the themes implied in the normative practices (Chapter 3). The second part of the Chapter 4 (*Insight*) as a strategic practical theology (:58) developed strategies for the Korean church based on the integration. As a result, this thesis concludes by proposing the following practical strategies as suggestions, however not solutions:

#### 1. Preaching context

(1) The first strategy is *to place preaching in the interaction between church and culture*.

(2) The second strategy is *to see the congregation as a culture, which implies both that the congregation has a culture (subcultures) and that it is a culture (subcultures)*.

## 2. Preaching theory

(1) The first strategy is *to seek preaching as multiple purposes, multiple forms, and multiple aspects for culturally appropriate communication of the gospel*.

(2) The second strategy is *to understand preaching as theological interpretation of the contexts as well as the text in partnership with the congregation for theologically accurate communication of the gospel*.

(3) The third strategy is *to integrate preaching and teaching, conversion preaching and congregational preaching, and preaching and other Christian practices for a holistically balanced communication of the gospel*.

## 3. Conversion preaching

(1) The first strategy is *to reconsider conversion preaching in relation to the congregation and cultural context*.

(2) The second strategy is *to define conversion as a holistic hermeneutical communal divine process in Christian preaching*.

## 4. Ecclesiology

A multipurpose strategy proposed for the Korean church is *a theocentric communalistic participant ecclesiology for an essentially and effectively balanced ministry, both within the church and with culture*.

## 5. Christian culture

A strategic model proposed for the Korean church is *selective engaging and disengaging in participation*.

Ultimately, preaching should be understood as an interaction between church and culture. The preacher, who was considered the main actor in the old setting that placed him or her in the center of church practices, is essentially an *inter-*

*actor* in this new setting. As an inter-actor, the preacher should be a servant who serves and stands between God and the congregation. As an inter-actor, the preacher should be an intercultural missionary who works between cultures.

At this point, the focus should return to contextual experience so that the relevance of the developed strategies may be tested in the actual preaching context of the Korean church. The conclusions of strategic practical theology, however, play back on the entire hermeneutical circle because the practices that emerge from the judgments of strategic practical theology soon engender new questions. Subsequently, the hermeneutic circle starts once again. Within the flux and turns of history, our present practices seem to be secure only for a period before they meet a new crisis that poses new questions that take us through the hermeneutic circle again (Browning 1991:58).

It is my sincere hope that this study will encourage Korean preachers to place preaching appropriately and efficiently in the interaction between church and culture. Preaching should not simply be at the center of the church. To be more precise, it should be understood as interaction between church and culture. My expectation is that this thesis will challenge Korean preachers to ask themselves what they have achieved so far and where they are in terms of preaching theory for a culturally appropriate, theologically accurate, and holistically balanced communication of the gospel. My sincere hope is that this work will encourage Korean preachers to identify themselves afresh as inter-actors to stand *between* the cultures to serve God and the congregation. My wish is also that this study would help Korean preachers to reconsider conversion preaching in relation to the congregation and cultural context and to redefine conversion as a holistic hermeneutical communal divine process in preaching. In doing so, they would defend conversion preaching without compromising. They would also exercise it without cease in contemporary pluralistic Korean society.

My hope is that this thesis will inspire the Korean church to accept a theocentric communalistic participant ecclesiology. In doing so, the church would participate selectively in engaging and disengaging seriously and theologically in a participation model. This would be in the hope that she might regain the cultural initiative she lost over the Korean society and even formulate an admirable Christian culture within it.

Above all, however, our hope is only in God. We serve God who so loved us that He gave His one and only Son (Jn 3:16). We serve Christ who says that He will be with us always (Mt 28:20). We serve the Spirit who empowers us to be His witness (Act 1:8). Through our faith in God, Christ, and Spirit, there is always only hope. The Korean church needs not only preachers who are dedicated to the expressed visions of this study, but who are also disciplined to make these visions possible.

## **5.2 Recommendations for further study**

While this thesis has raised more questions than it has been able to address, it is convinced that further research on the following issues needs to be undertaken in the near future:

On the integration of the multi aspects of preaching:

We have attempted to integrate only two elements of preaching, namely proclaiming and teaching. One of the important findings of this study is the fact that preaching can be seen as an activity with many aspects, which are highlighted by New Testament words such as *proclaiming, announcing good news, witnessing, teaching, prophesying, and exhorting*. Although one aspect or another may certainly be accentuated to match the text and the contemporary audience, preaching cannot be reduced to only one of its many aspects.

On the identity of Korean Christian:

A recent issue of interest to many people is the identity of Korean Christians in relation to Korean culture and/or traditional religions (cf Chapter 2 in this thesis; S W Cho 2001; M J Lee 2000; C M Son 2002; D C S Lee 2003). Chapter 2 discussed whether the Korean Christian identity is multifold (such as the Shamanistic Christian or Confucianistic Christian identities). This is in line with what the liberal theologians claim in relation to religious pluralism. It is declared that such twofold or multifold identity does not fit the Korean religious ethos.

It is reasonable to add that besides cultural view, we should not overlook the theological view of God (theology, Christology, pneumatology), of human nature (theological anthropology), of the church (ecclesiology), of the church's relation to other human groups (missiology, evangelism), of nature (theology of creation), and of time orientation (eschatology) (cf L Tisdale 1992:159-68). The conversation partners for the qualitative interviewing in this study also indicated the identity crisis of Korean Christians. The question is therefore to determine genuine Korean Christian identity and how to help Korean Christians to establish their Korean Christian identity. These are challenging but worthy subjects for further study.

On the new understanding of practical theology:

A discussion of practical theology in Korea (1.2.4) in Chapter 1 challenges our attention to a new understanding or paradigm shift of practical theology for the Korean Church. While such a discussion has been theoretical in nature, further study on this has yet to be carried out on a more practical level in order to present the implications based on the new understanding.