

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The Korean church has grown rapidly since it was founded in the 1880s. After the mid 1980s, however, just after the Korean Protestant church celebrated its centennial year in 1984, it suffered a decline or stagnation in membership. The Korean church has tried to overcome these crises as regards its membership through several changes in church ministries. It has introduced seeker services, music services, drama, cell churches, G-12 seminars, etc.

These functional approaches cannot, however, solve the deeper problem of the ecclesiology of the Korean church. While several reasons have been identified, one of the main reasons for the decline has been the distortion of ecclesiology from a faithful and relevant one (Gwak 2000). The Korean Protestant church has failed to articulate her identity according to a biblical and a Reformed tradition during the transition from modernity to postmodernity. The first requirement for the Korean church at this time is to develop a biblical and relevant ecclesiology for church ministries.

In the New Testament we are told that the church was created by the apostles' preaching and the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). Reformers such as John Calvin and Martin Luther have stated that the two marks of the church that distinguish a true church from a false church are preaching and sacraments (Van Gelder 2000a:142). They restored the centrality of the Word of God to the life of congregations. Calvin (1960:1023) defined the church as follows: "Whenever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."

One of the important Protestant confessions, the Belgic Confession, also describes the marks of the True Church as follows: Article 29, The Marks of the True Church, states that the true church “engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practises church discipline for correcting faults”. This is followed by a summary statement: “In short, [the true church] governs itself according to the pure Word of God...” (Van Gelder 2000a:143). The church’s life is to be governed by the Word. Preaching is an indispensable ministry for the life and mission of the church.

Leander Keck (1993:99) describes the importance of preaching in the life of the church as follows: “the self-communication of God is communicated in the gospel. Since the church lives by the gospel, communication is at the heart of its life. Consequently, the renewal of the mainline churches will manifest itself in the renewal of their communication.”

However, Richard Lischer and William Willimon (1995:15; cf Lischer 1992:76-77) point out the problem of a contemporary homiletic trend by mentioning that “homiletics is often tempted to follow its own interests rather than the needs of the church. The church’s life and needs should govern the kind of scholarship that goes on in homiletics.” Charles L Campbell (1997:121) also states that in America the mainline church has itself been in decline during the period in which narrative preaching has thrived. Even though preaching must necessarily have a close relationship with the church, there is no room for the church (Campbell 1997:230). As Justin Martyr says, “preaching once belonged to the church” (Lischer 1992:76). But its recovery is not an easy task. Homiletic theory and praxis need to be related to the life of the church.

Therefore, the problem of this study is how preaching could serve to build up a church in transition. What is a faithful and relevant ecclesiology of the Korean church in a transition? What homiletic theory can we postulate for building up the church during this transition? What would the hermeneutic-communicative characteristics of a homiletic theory be for the formation of the identity of the church as a community in transition?

1.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to develop a homiletic theory for praxis that will help preachers to proclaim the gospel message meaningfully in the declining situation of the Korean church in order for the church to articulate her identity and mission in the Korean context. As preaching is a hermeneutic-communicative act, a homiletic theory has two aspects – hermeneutic and communicative aspect. Therefore this study has two objectives. First objective is to develop a homiletic hermeneutic for articulating the identity of the church. Second is to consider a communicative style, sermon form, and language for the upbuilding of the church.

1.3 HYPOTHESES

The hypothesis with which this study deals is that preaching as a hermeneutic-communicative act has to do with a biblical and contextual ecclesiology that can serve to build up the church during its transition. The goal of preaching is the formation and transformation of the identity of the church. However, the assumption is that contemporary homiletic theory and praxis of the churches in Korea which have linked an accommodated ecclesiology to contemporary culture can bring growth to the church.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The term “methodology” means the scientific study of methods or procedures undertaken in the cause of research (Van Wyk 1995:85). Without a sound and clear methodology, according to Johannes Van der Ven (1999:323), “Practical theology cannot fulfil its task: reflecting on the people’s praxis from the view point of God’s revelatory praxis in a way that is as scientific as possible.”

In developing a homiletic theory for praxis for preachers who are struggling to build up the church which is passing through a period of transition through their preaching, a

practical theological methodology could prove most useful. It should be remembered that homiletics is a subdiscipline of practical theology.

Therefore, before developing a homiletic theory by means of a practical theological method, we should start with an explanation of a practical theological methodology. In order to identify a practical theological methodology for this study, in this section, I supply a historical overview of practical theology, including a definition and a description of the methodology and models of practical theology. This is followed by the application of a methodology of practical theology to this study.

1.4.1 Practical theology and homiletics

In order to develop a homiletic theory as a hermeneutic-communicative action theory, it is necessary to start from an understanding of the relationship between practical theology and homiletics.

T Hoekstra (in Schuringa 1995:20) defines homiletics as a “practical theological discipline which has for its object the ministry of the Word, especially in the gathered congregation of Christ.” Homiletics is a subdiscipline of practical theology. Homiletics has a place in the field of practical theology and is concerned with the coming of God to men through the preached Word (Schuringa 1995:20). Recently our understanding of practical theology has changed from one of a clerical-pastoral theology to a church-oriented practical theology (Farley 1983; Fowler 1999). In this interpretation, homiletics should no longer be seen as the pastor’s technique but the church’s praxis for communicating the Gospel. A homiletic theory for praxis needs to be developed within practical theology.

1.4.2 Practical theology

To identify a methodology for this study, it would be helpful to discuss what practical theology is and what its methodology should be.

1.4.2.1 A brief history of the understanding of practical theology

For the past two decades, there has been a quiet but radical revolution in the self-understanding and work of practical theology (Fowler 1999:75; Schuringa 2000:153; Browning 1988:83; Dingemans 1996a:83). This revolution centres around the recovery and re-emergence of practical theology as a discipline. According to James W Fowler (1999:75), practical theology has been regarded as one of the applied disciplines, while biblical studies, church history, systematic theology and ethics are considered to be the classical disciplines.

The assumption was that the creative work in theology went on in the fields of biblical studies, historical studies and, most especially, systematic theology. Ethics, because it touched on practical and political aspects, occupied a somewhat ambiguous position. Unconsciously, theological faculties absorbed the positive bias toward what might be called pure reason, namely scholarship that proceeded in accordance with the canons of pure research in the sciences. In theological education the results of scholarly inquiry and constructive interpretation in the so-called classical disciplines of theology would be appropriated and applied in the work of church leadership and pastoral practices (Fowler 1999:75-76). Practical theology was relegated to the position of a step-child discipline or derivative and second-hand field in theological studies. In this perspective pastors and educators were encouraged to think of themselves as consumers and transmitters of theology, but not as producers. And the laity were viewed as passive recipients of this second-hand theology transmitted by pastors and educators. Fowler (1999:75) argues that this stems from an unfortunate understanding of the relation between theory and practice.

By the early 1980s, however, some new perspectives on the nature and work of theology had begun to take shape. Edward Farley (1983:21-41), a systematic theologian, formulated these new understandings in a way that had a broad influence. He identified four major phases in the evolution of theology as a central activity and concern of the church, and later, the university. The impact of his analysis was to shake

up the routinised assumptions about “pure” and “applied” theology. Farley classifies the four phases in theology’s evolution as follows:

The first phase began with the New Testament church and continued until the early Middle Ages. In this era, theology involved personal and existential inquiry into the mysteries of divine revelation, undertaken for the sake of helping the Christian community live toward truth. Farley (1983:23) calls this approach theology as *habitus* – theology as knowledge of God pursued through the disciplines of prayer, study, liturgical participation, and the practices of discipleship. Theology as *habitus* refers to “an actual, individual cognition of God and things related to God” (Farley 1983:31). The goal of theology *habitus* was the formation of people and communities in accordance with the revealed knowledge of God.

The second phase in theology’s evolution began to emerge from the second to the fourth centuries in the intellectual responses of the church to the challenges of heresies within and competitive intellectual ideologies from without. The joining of Christian doctrine with the philosophical perspectives of neo-Platonism in the work of Augustine provides a powerful example. Farley (1983:23-24) calls this phase ‘Theology Science’. He sees it at its height in the great *Summas Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas, with its rational reconciliation of the recovered philosophy of Aristotle with Augustinian theology. In this era theology emerged as the dominant ordering framework for grounding all human knowledge in the West. Theology was, indeed, “the queen of the sciences”. ‘Theology Science’ provided the intellectual energy and thrust for the founding of the great medieval universities. It persisted – at least in Roman Catholicism – until well beyond the Counter-Reformation.

The next great wave of change in theology, as Farley (1983:23) says, accompanied the impact of the Renaissance and the Reformation, with their respective returns to classical and biblical antiquity. The fresh retrieval of humanistic traditions, unshackled from theological control, gave fresh impetus to scholarly study. The translations of the Latin and Greek texts of the New Testament into vernacular languages opened the way for the fresh illuminations and intense controversies of the Reformation.

Coupled with the dawning of the age of scientific inquiry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these movements gave rise to the modern research university, with its movement towards the transformation of education for the classical professions into the work of specialised disciplines of research. No longer “queen of the sciences”, theology had to struggle to maintain a presence in the new universities. By forming alliances with the emerging “scientific” disciplines of history, philosophy, philology, and rationally grounded ethics, various departments of specialised theological study began to form. Theology Science became theological sciences (Farley 1983:24).

A unity and working relationship between these disciplinary specialities in theology was maintained by their contributions to the professional grounding of university-educated pastors and priests. Schleiermacher’s famous proposal for the role of practical theology as the place where the theological disciplines meet to inform the work of ecclesial science provided one such influential rationale for the continuing presence of theological faculties in the now secularising universities (Farley 1983:24).

As specialisation continued, professional guilds of scholars in the various theological disciplines have generated both confidence and ever-increasing rigor in their work. This has inevitably led to diminished conversation and collaboration between the disciplines, and often to a growing distancing of the work of theological scholars from that of the ministries of the churches.

The fourth phase in the evolution of the work of theology is identified by Farley as systematic or dogmatic theology. Now separated from history of Christian thought, from ethics, and often from Biblical studies, systematic theology has itself become a specialised discipline. In academic circles it has increasingly given attention to issues of methodology and concerns about the legitimisation of its work as a discipline. In the latter third of the twentieth century academic systematic theology has on the whole become increasingly remote from the practices of Christian faith in the churches and in our societies (Farley 1983:29).

The emerging new field of practical theology has directly challenged this state of affairs. It has forcefully reasserted the claim that theology, in any “classical” era, was an eminently practical theology. Theology in any of these now “classical” eras had the character rather of theology *habitus* than of the theological sciences. It was concerned with the shaping or re-shaping of the practices of the church so that they reflected faithfulness to Christ and formed congregations of folk through whom Christ could make his appeal in the world (Browning 1988:83).

1.4.2.2 Definition and characteristics of practical theology

According to Schuringa (2000:156), for practical theology to find its own place, it should be approached from the perspective of “praxis.” At the heart of practical theology’s self-understanding and effort to communicate its work lies the concept of “praxis”, which is found in the theology and philosophy of the ancient concept of praxis (Fowler 1999:78; Schuringa 2000:156-157).

It is important to explain the term “praxis” right at the start. Fowler (1999:80) explains the meaning of the praxis in practical theology. First, praxis is not identical with practice. The English word practice, according to Groome (1980:152), is not an adequate translation of praxis, especially when practice is used in the usual sense of “putting theory into practice.” Praxis is purposeful, intentional, and reflectively chosen ethical action (Groome 1980:152). Groome speaks of the importance of offsetting the dichotomy between theory and practice so prevalent in our Western mindset. To understand praxis requires a shift in consciousness away from dichotomising theory and practice, toward seeing them as twin moments of the same activity that are united dialectically. Instead of theory leading to practice, theory becomes or is seen as the reflective moment in praxis, and articulated theory arises from that praxis to yield to further praxis.

Secondly, praxis has two connotations that derive, respectively, from its Aristotelian heritage, on the one hand, and its Marxist heritage, on the other. For Aristotle, praxis was the ongoing integration of action and reflection through which the political process

maintained and adapted the practices of the city-state necessary for it to flourish (Groome 1980:14). Praxis is an activity of the total person – head, heart, and lifestyle. For Marx, on the other hand praxis came to connote intentional action strategically aimed at the overthrow of the present patterns of economic and political domination and their replacement by the classless society. For Marx praxis meant the self-initiated and self-creating activity of human beings that is intentionally and reflectively carried out and transforms social reality in the direction of human emancipation (Groome 1980:167). To Marx, therefore, people know the world through a critical, reflective activity that transforms the world. In consequence, knowledge is not knowledge unless it is put into practice, and it is only in being reconstructed that the world is apprehended or known. For Marx theory is the articulation of the consciousness that arises from such human praxis, and it must return to inform further praxis. Therein lies the dialectical unity. It is in being actualised that theory is transcended, and further theory arises from its own actualisation for the sake of further praxis, and so on, in an ongoing process.

This dual heritage of the term praxis underlines the claim that practical theology has a stake in maintaining the viability of the practices of the churches and their missions. At the same time, it engages in ongoing critical and constructive efforts at transformation, with the object of achieving greater faithfulness and effectiveness of the churches in the societies in which they offer their witness (Fowler 1999:80).

Practical theology, according to Heitink (1999a), has praxis for its *locus theologicus*, in contrast to exegetical theology, historical theology, and systematic theology. Practical theology is praxis theology concerned with the theology of praxis. The work of Fieret (1986:5-12) provides a starting point. He defines the praxis of practical theology as every praxes through which God in his Word comes to humanity in today's world. Though, strictly speaking, every praxis through which God comes to man in his Word today is of interest to practical theology, it is especially the praxes of the church that occupy a central position, owing to the current focus of seminaries on official ministerial training (Schuringa 2000:157).

Firet (1987:34) refines his definition of practical theology as “the theological theory concerning systems of activities which serve the intermediation of the coming of God to people in his word.” On the basis of this interpretation, practical theory has two characteristics. Firstly, practical theology is defined as a theological discipline that has for its object of study every praxis through which God comes to people today in his Word, especially the praxes of the church. Secondly, practical theology is an action science (Zerfass 1974; Heyns & Pieterse 1990; Browning 1991; Van der Ven 1993; Heitink 1999a; Pieterse 2001a). Finally, Gerben Heitink (1999a:6) defines practical theology as a theory of action that is the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society. Practical theology could be defined as the study of communicative acts in the service of the gospel within the context of modern society (Pieterse 2001a:8; Heitink 1999a:154). Malan Nel (1999) notes that the communicative acts should be in the service of the gospel and the realised and still-to-be-realised kingdom of God in modern society.

Practical theology as a theological discipline

Mette, according to Heitink (1999a:104), states that practical theology must be conceived of as a theological theory of action within a theology that is understood as a practice-oriented science. This understanding assigns practical theology its own place within theology as a whole: practical theology is a theological discipline.

According to Pieterse, any definition of practical theology must take cognisance of the hermeneutical and communicative nature of theology. Traditionally, theology has been considered to be the knowledge of God. Hence God was the direct object of theology. Theologians compiled lists of God’s attributes on the basis of the direct observation of God. However, this understanding has changed; one cannot study God as the direct object of theology (Pieterse 2001a:10).

The object of theology, in the reformed tradition, is said to be God’s revelation in Jesus Christ (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:4). WD Jonker (in Heyns & Pieterse 1990:4) explains this more precisely when he says that theology is concerned with God’s revelation in

Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit as attested in Scripture and as understood and made meaningful in people's lives through the word and Spirit of God. According to him, God's word is authoritatively attested in Scripture and it is the word that is the subject matter of theology, a point which he reiterates forcefully: the whole of theology is concerned with only one thing, namely the word of God. Clearly, then, the word of God plays a cardinal role in the reformed view of the objective of theology.

Because God cannot be objectivised and captured in human concepts, God cannot be the object of theology. God is far more and far greater than our thinking about the divine. It would be presumptuous to think that the human mind can encapsulate God. So the object of theological study is human faith in God and human religious statements about God. Theology is concerned with both God and humanity. Theology is a variegated science. It studies the Bible, analyses the religious statements of churches and individuals, discusses the church's witness, traces its history and evaluates the religious praxis of congregations.

This opens the door to a hermeneutical approach to theology in its entirety (Heitink 1999a:111). The object of Christian theology, of theology as the science of divinity, is therefore the Christian faith, which is known through its sources, through its tradition, and in its past and present manifestation of belief. This means that the distinction between theology as profession and theology as *habitus* is not clearly defined.

In this conception, there is no clear differentiation between biblical, systematic, historical, and practical theology. They are no longer placed beside each other as separate disciplines but are hermeneutically tied together (Pieterse 2001a:8). After all, hermeneutics is a matter of "saying," "explaining," "translating", of "knowing," "interpreting," and "acting" (Heitink 1999a:111). Heitink (1999a:111-112) states that this hermeneutic approach serves to correct the objectifying, encyclopaedic approach. It creates the necessary unity in the theological enterprise as a whole and assigns practical theology, in its attempt to bring people to fuller understanding, its own place. This fits in with the description of the object of practical theology in the definition: the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society.

According to Heitink (1999a:108), Martin Luther saw the object of theology in the relationship between humanity and God. John Calvin, in his Institutes (1559) also argued that our knowledge of God and our knowledge of ourselves are intimately connected. This unity between revelation and experience has contributed to the view of theology as a practical discipline.

The object of theology is the human experience of God and faith in God in the past (revelation in the Scriptures) and in the history of the Christian church, as well as contemporary experience and faith (Pieterse 1998a:182). The direct object of theology is Christian faith. God is thus an indirect object of study. Theology studies the faith of people in God, and their religious experience and religious praxis. Theology works through a hermeneutical approach, and also through practical theology.

The hermeneutic perspective is important in practical theology. Along with Furet, Heitink (1999a:111) emphasises the unity of the hermeneutic and the *agogic* moment in practical theology: “the word has the power to clarify, by which understanding arises; and the power to influence, by which change occurs.” In accordance with the views of Van der Ven, Heitink (:111) views the praxis of practical theology as a hermeneutical-communicative praxis. This introduces a theory of action to practical theology.

Practical theology as a theory of action

A contemporary consensus view of practical theology is that it is an action science (Furet 1986; Heyns & Pieterse 1990; Browning 1991; Van der Ven 1993; Heitink 1999). According to Heitink (1999a:126), theories of action are both theories of action that attempt to describe and explain social and human reality and theories of action that attempt to influence and change that reality.

Writing from this perspective Heitink (1999a:126) describes action as follows: “To act is to pursue a goal, to work toward an intentional and active realization of certain plans, by utilizing specific means in a given situation.” Therefore, practical theology is an empirical theory of action. This means that the empirical character of practical theology

must always be understood in relation to its fundamental hermeneutical character (Heitink 1999a:127).

Practical theological theory cannot be content with an analysis and interpretation of praxis, but must also deal with the consequences of actions. To Heitink (1999a:128), practical theology as a theory of action aims to describe and interpret all religious phenomena, but concentrates on mediative action: the praxis of the “mediative of salvation”. This explains the initial emphasis on the activities of the church and the ministry. Actions are performed by all Christians in every sphere. These acts are communicated not just in language but also in deeds. They are intentional acts aimed at intervening in a situation with a view to transforming it. The transformation happens in accordance with the values of God’s Kingdom in the lives of individuals, in the church and in society. It happens through the proclamation of the gospel and through deeds performed in accordance with the gospel.

Heitink explains the meaning of action in practical theology as a theological theory of action. In discussing the concept of a theory of action, Firet (in Heitink 1999a:130) states: “Practical theology does not deal with human action in general, neither with the action of the believer nor the person who acts in the service of God, but specially with action that has to do with the actualisation and the maintenance of the relationship between God and humanity, and humanity and God.” To Firet and also J.A van der Ven, action is mediative (Heitink 1999a:130).

Heitink (1999a:131-132) explains it as the mediation between the Christian faith (praxis 1) and modern society (praxis 2). Praxis 1 indicates that the unique object of practical theology is related to intentional, more specially, intermediary or meditative, actions, with a view to changing a given situation through agogics (Heitink 1999a:8). Praxis 2 emphasises the context, where these actions take place, as a dynamic context in which men and women in society interact, whether or not their actions are religiously motivated while pursuing various goals (Heitink 1999a:8). Praxis 1 and praxis 2 constantly interrelate. This interconnectedness must be adequately stressed when developing a theory.

As a theory of action, practical theology, especially in the view of Heitink (1999a), has been influenced by the theories of Jürgen Habermas and Paul Ricoeur. Habermas develops the paradigm of communicative action and safeguards the critical perspective, while Ricoeur offers a model of interpretation and the basic outlines for a methodology that – through verbs such as “understanding” and “explaining” – links the hermeneutical (the perspective of the human sciences) with the empirical (the perspective of the social sciences). The two verbs represent an important element in the unique character of practical theology: the strategic perspective, encapsulated in another verb: change.

Hendrik Pieterse (1998a:179-182) sums up three characteristics of practical theology as follows:

Firstly, practical theology is a contextual theology. In contrast to other theological disciplines, practical theology does not aim at timeless, universal or comprehensive interpretations of Christian tradition.

Secondly, practical theology is inductive. Practical theology studies “popular religion” by means of empirical research. It stresses the importance of these experiences, the religious interpretation of these experiences and theological reflection in the light of the message of the Bible and theological tradition.

Thirdly, practical theology is a critical theology. At the heart of the concept of practical theology is the theory-praxis relationship. Critically, the relation between theory and praxis is one of bipolar tension, a relationship that should be neither totally separate nor totally identical.

Different approaches to practical theology

There are different approaches, depending on the relationship between theory and praxis. Heitink (1999a:171-176) distinguishes those that ran through history as follows: the normative-deductive approach; the hermeneutical-mediative approach; the

empirical-analytical approach; the political-critical approach and the pastoral-theological approach.

The normative-deductive approach (traditional approach)

This approach is primarily interested in the practice of ministers in an ecclesiastical context. Action is based on a normative theological theory. In this model the social sciences function as *ancilla theologiae*. This approach is found in orthodox theological practice, applying biblical passages directly to contemporary questions. The only possible form of mediation is the proclamation. Representatives of this approach are E Thurneysen and R Bohren. The limitation of this approach is that it does not provide a hermeneutical and empirical reflection on the relationship between theory and praxis (Heitink 1999b:137).

The hermeneutical-mediative approach

This approach focuses on a hermeneutical orientation in practical theology with the aim of mediation. J Furet developed this approach in the 1960s. He emphasised that the heart of pastoral and ecclesiastical practice is not the activity of human beings but that of God who, with the official ministry as his intermediary, comes to people in his Word. Official and ecclesiastical patterns of action must be examined from the point of view of effectiveness and legitimacy. The aim of this examination is to improve human action in the service of the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Heitink 1999b:137).

The search in practical theology is directed at integrating hermeneutical, empirical and strategic perspectives in a theory of action in fields such as preaching, pastoral care, church development and social action. Practical theologians combine quantitative and qualitative methods of research, but they prefer qualitative methods. The strength of this approach is the emphasis on theological reflection and its direct relevance for the practice of congregations and their ministers (Heitink 1999b:137). GDJ Dingemans, R Bons-Storm, AK Ploeger, J Furet, G Heitink in the Netherlands, W Greive, R Zerfass and M Josuttis in Germany are the representatives of this paradigm.

The empirical-analytical approach

JA van der Ven developed this approach (cf. Van der Ven 1993). He is a professor at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, and has extensively documented his studies, usually described as “empirical theology”, which are based on his research of many years. This approach, like the hermeneutical-mediative approach, emphasises a hermeneutical perspective and includes an empirical aspect (Heitink 1999b:138). But according to Van der Ven, both aspects are important to an empirical approach for validating theological knowledge and falsifying wrong insights about the empirical relevance of theological concepts (1999b:139). He strongly acknowledges the potential of social scientific research. This is expressed by the term “intradisciplinary” (Heitink 1999a:173). It means that theologians must be fully conversant with social scientific methodology and must utilise this in dealing with theological problems (1999a:173-174). Inductive and deductive approaches are combined, as are quantitative and qualitative methods. But to gain valid knowledge, this approach prefers quantitative analyses based on questionnaires that produce a representative view of a chosen population.

The strength of this model lies in its attempt to make theological concepts operational, and in the empirical methodology used, which confers high academic status. Moreover, it seeks to link in an open manner quantitative and qualitative research, and the perspective of a spectator with that of a participant (Heitink 1999a:174).

The political-critical approach

According to Heitink (1999b:139), this approach can be divided into two different orientations. The first is connected with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and takes cognisance of the position of Gert Otto in Germany, who defines practical theology as “kritische Theorie religiös vermittelter Praxis in der Gesellschaft” (in Heitink 1999b:139). From this Neo-Marxist perspective, economic interests dominate human knowledge and beliefs. The hermeneutics of suspicion is considered to offer the best guarantee of reaching the truth.

The second perspective deals with the action-reflection model of liberation theology. From this perspective, the concept of the “church of the poor” plays an important role. The emancipatory interest of knowledge offers a central place to the poor as the subject of theologising, expressing their experience and suffering. Listening to their experiences and reflecting on them from the perspective of Christian belief in an attempt to liberate them from oppression opens up an approach to theology that is quite different from academic theology. This approach prefers doing empirical research from the perspective of the actor, concretised in methods of action research (Heitink 1999b:139).

Heitink (1999a:175) says that “the strength of this current is its engagement and involvement with those whom the gospel addresses emphatically: the poor and the persecuted. This bias may, however, lead to one-sidedness, since the preference for one perspective excludes other points of view.”

The pastoral-theological approach

This approach is in part a continuation of the old pastoral theology and also of the mainstream American *habitus* tradition, which is quite different from the European encyclopaedic way of theologising (Heitink 1999a:176). It shares an orientation towards the praxis of the church, in particular from the vantage point of the professional activities of the pastor. Pastoral theology serves the education and training of ministers in this approach. Dewey’s pragmatism forms the educational base of this approach (Heitink 1999b:139).

Seward Hiltner pioneered this approach to theology at the academic level. His point of departure – the role of pastor – leads him to give psychology a central place in his thinking, as far as the social sciences are concerned (Heitink 1999a:176). In the Netherlands H Faber, E van der Schoot, W Zijlstra, H Andriessen and PWM Claessens are among the leading proponents. In Germany, D Stollberg, R Riess, HC Piper and H van der Geest have contributed to the development of the theoretical basis. While in North America the movement is strongly pragmatic, the emphasis in Europe is mainly on theological reflection (Heitink 1999a:176).

Heitink (1999a:177) evaluates this approach as follows:

The significance of this stream lies most of all in its contribution to competent and communicative action and in “doing” theology in an experience-oriented manner. Its limitation is in the clinical setting of a psychological model and in the lack of involvement with the needs of society (Höfte 1990:78ff.). Moreover, professionalization is a product with side effects.

In conclusion: These approaches are not mutually exclusive but can be seen as complementary. They are related to different theological and methodological positions (Heitink 1999b:136).

1.4.2.3 A methodology of practical theology

The structure of practical theology

Practical theology is defined as a theological theory of action (Heitink 1999a). It has two perspectives: a theological discipline and a theory of action. These two aspects of practical theology are important in developing a theological theory of action as the core of a practical-theological theory (Heitink 1999a:148).

Practical theological research is hermeneutical by nature, but empirical by design (Pieterse 1998a:190; Heitink 1999c: 266). It is hermeneutical by nature because the research is directed to a process of understanding: i.e. the understanding of the meaning of the Christian tradition in the context of modern society. It requires an empirical design, because practical theological research chooses its starting point in the actual situation of church and society. This situation has to be understood as a situation of action, that has to be explained by empirical research but interpreted by theological theories (Heitink 1999c:266).

The theory-praxis relationship

The starting point of methodology is to arrive at the correct relationship between theory and praxis. According to Heitink (1999a:149), the important character of a theory of action may be discerned in the dialectic relation between theory and praxis.

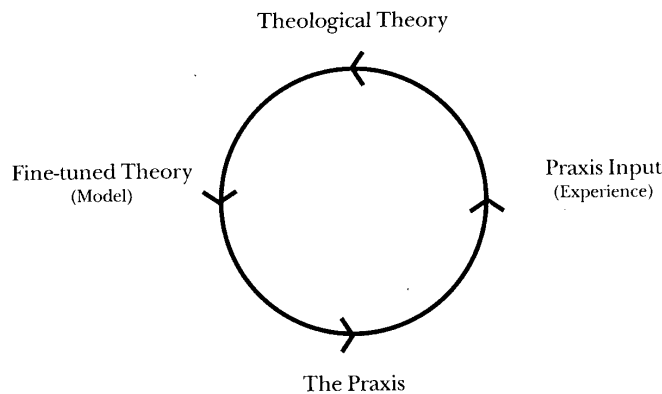
Heitink (1999a:151) defines praxis as “the actions of individuals and groups in society, within and outside the church, who are willing to be inspired in their private and public lives by the Christian tradition, and who want to focus on the salvation of humankind and the world”. Theory is defined as “a comprehensive hermeneutical-theological statement that relates the Christian tradition to experience, to the life and actions of modern humans” (Heitink 1999a:151).

This study accepts the thesis that theory and praxis are in a bipolar tension and are therefore open on both sides to a critical interaction (Heitink 1999a:151). This bipolar relation implies that the relationship between theory and praxis is dialectical, indicating that it needs to be approached hermeneutically. The results of inductive (empirical) research on the praxis of religious communicative actions can be critical to (theological) theory and, vice versa, theory can be critical to the contextual praxis of religious communicative actions. This bipolar structure implies that empirical research on the context leads to new interpretations of the Christian tradition. But this reinterpretation of the tradition (text) in turn sheds a new light on the concrete contemporary situation (Heitink 1999a:149ff; Pieterse 1998a:190). In this approach there is an ongoing critical interaction between theory and praxis evoked by theological empirical research and theological interpretation of the research. New understandings are reached and our theories and praxis modified through critical correlative hermeneutics (Pieterse 1998a:190-91).

Theory and praxis necessarily interact continuously. Praxis is directed from, or interpreted on the basis of, a specific theory (Heitink 1999a:148). Therefore, a theory of action is developed in the dialectic relation between theory and praxis.

Theological theory requires the verification/correction of praxis and praxis depends on critical theory. Theological theory and praxis can inform and correct one another in a

reciprocal manner. This continuous process, which avoids the pitfalls of either pragmatism or traditionalism, illustrates why an appropriate term for the way practical theology works is “praxis-oriented theory”. Henry D. Schuringa (2000:160) explains the process in the following diagram.



The Reflective and Praxis Moments of the Praxis (Schuringa 1995:19)

The praxis also entails the functioning of the church and congregation, of all believers in the church and in society.

Heitink (1999a:151-153), following N Greimacher, elaborates on the relation between theory and praxis as follows: firstly, there is no pure theory of praxis. Theory is always subject to the impact of history and is conditioned by society. Secondly, though at times one is unaware of it, praxis is always based on an underlying theory. Praxis is always, at least in part, determined by theory. Failing to recognise this leads to an ideological praxis. Thirdly, the primacy of theory over praxis, long defended by practical theology, must be rejected. Fourthly, likewise, one must reject a primacy of praxis over theory – a view of Marxist elements, supported by some social scientists, and at times either consciously or unconsciously accepted by church leaders. Such a view would eventually result in the confirmation of the status quo in the church. Fifthly, the relation between theological theory and ecclesiastical praxis is determined neither by a complete separation nor by an identification of the two, but by a bipolar tension-filled combination. The shift from theory to praxis, and vice versa, is a qualitative shift. Theory is in constant need of verification or falsification through praxis, while praxis

must constantly be transcended by theory. Theory in the context of practical theology must always be critical theory.

This thesis shows practical theology as a fully operational discipline. Theory must constantly be tested in praxis. This requires empirically oriented practical theological research. At the same time, praxis must be constantly subjected to critical review from theory. This demands an ongoing development of hermeneutical theory.

Therefore, bipolarity is not a correlation of question and answer, but creates a tension-filled, critical relation. Schuringa (1995:18-19) explains the relation between theory and praxis as follows: The priority of theological theory forming is based not only on an intrinsic value of reflecting upon God, but is also founded on the priority of the existence of God and his self-revelation with respect to created reality. In other words, it is more than a mere logical priority. It is a “*theo*-logical” priority of theology over praxis. All theological theory formation occurs in the praxis and with a view to the praxis. The two can never be separated. The road between theological theory and praxis is not a one-way street in either direction, neither is it strictly inductive nor deductive; both exist as part of the praxis in a dialectical tension through a bipolar tension-unity.

Conceived like this, practical theological theory is a hermeneutical-communicative praxis. Heitink (1999a:153-154) explains this as follows:

Practical theology starts from the situation, the praxis. An experienced people have (praxis) becomes the object of reflection on the basic theological statements (theory). This theory, which itself is the result of the thinking and actions of the past, and reflects the distribution of power of the past, apparently fails to convince people in their contemporary praxis. Many ask critical questions: Did the people of the past arrive at an adequate understanding of certain biblical texts, in the light of their times? This leads to a rereading of Scripture, and subsequently to a revision of the theory. A new theoretical insight then asks critical questions with regard to the existing praxis. Why do things happen as they do? These and other questions lead to a re-examination of praxis. Which factors are determinative for the current situation? Why do people think and act as they do? Is there any alternative? This leads to further questions about the theory and any subsequent answers also have their impact on praxis. People recognize their situation and learn to view this with new eyes, in the light of a “fresh” theory. It prompts them to initiate and change things, which leads to a renewal of praxis. This, in turn, prompts further questions to the theory, leading to a circular process. This is often set in motion through

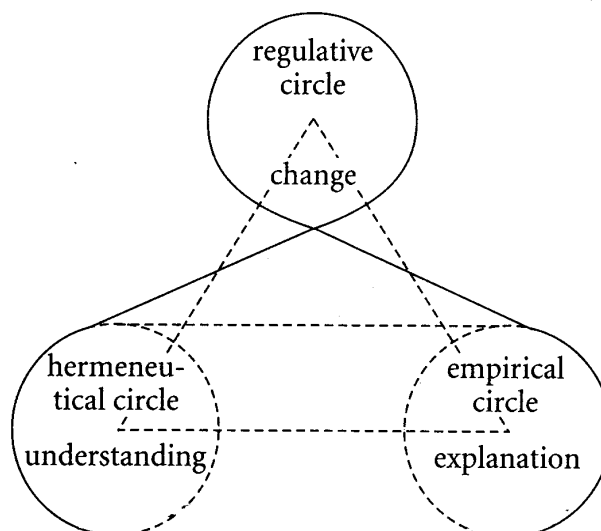
mediative action, through education, group discussions, dialogue, or through participation in an action group that stimulates this process.

Therefore, the heart of the concept of practical theology is the theory-praxis relationship. We deem the relationship of theory and praxis to be one of bipolar tension, that is, a relationship that should be neither totally separate nor identical (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:31).

Three aspects of the methodology of practical theology

Practical theology is a hermeneutic-communicative praxis. The methodology of practical theology has three aspects: understanding, explanation, and change. Ricoeur regards “understanding” and “explanation” as the two foci of the hermeneutical circle. Both are of great importance for the methodology of practical theology. The third concept, “change”, is inherent in any form of action. An action is always an intervention in reality that leaves its mark. Change is the direct objective of practical theology, mediative action, and strategy for transformation (Heitink 1999a:163; Pieterse 2001a:8).

Heitink (1999a:165) explains his methodology with reference to the following figure.



A methodology of practical theology: Heitink's model, 1999a:165

It shows three circles: the hermeneutical circle, as the interpretation that is typical of human sciences; the empirical circle, as the testing circle that is typical of natural sciences; and the regulative circle, which is typical of the methodology in practical thinking (Heitink 1999a:165). Heitink (1999a:165) explains this figure. In the human sciences, according to Ricoeur, the first two become part of an ellipse with understanding and explanation as its foci. The unique aspect in practical theology as a discipline of mediative action is the interconnectedness of these three circles in a distinct circuitous system or “circuit” of theory formation.

The three circles correspond to the distinctive goals of the discipline: the interpretation of human action in the light of the Christian tradition (the hermeneutical perspective), the analysis of human action with regard to its factuality and potentiality (the empirical perspective), and the development of action models and action strategies for the various domains of action (the strategic perspective) (Heitink 1999a:165). These three lines converge into one single theory in the integrative approach (Heitink 1999a:103).

Hermeneutical perspective

Practical theology, according to Pieterse (1998a:183), is studied within the modern framework of critical-correlational hermeneutics. Practical theological theory of interpretation rests on the mediation between tradition and experience. The hermeneutical question is how divine reality and human reality can be connected at the experiential level (Heitink 1999a: 193). That is, its main task is to ensure that the words of Scripture, which were a great source of strength to people in the past, can be experienced in today’s context as comforting and liberating and serve as a source of inspiration for action (Heitink 1999a:193).

The presupposition underlying hermeneutical insights is that interpretive interaction and the process of the hermeneutical circle pertain not only to written texts but also to human actions that can be interpreted in the same way as texts (Pieterse 1998a:183). This structure of hermeneutics has a circular character, and is usually referred to as the “hermeneutical circle” (Heitink 1999a:163).

Three phases of the hermeneutical process as identified by Ricoeur are applied in theological research within the frame of reference of critical-correlational hermeneutics. The first phase is marked by participatory understanding of the text and context concerned, and here personal engagement is necessary. The hermeneutical approach that is characteristic of the human sciences is often referred to by the German word *verstehen* (to understand). The second phase is characterised by the explication of the text and context, and in this phase distanciation is necessary. This empirical approach, characteristic of the natural sciences, is often referred to by the word *erklären* (to explain) (Heitink 1999a:144). The third phase is again marked by participatory understanding, but here the results of the scientific analysis of the second phases are taken into account – thus leading to objectification (Pieterse 1994:79). The dialectic of understanding and explication can be seen as a dual movement: a movement from understanding towards explication, and from explication towards understanding (Heitink 1999a:144).

The praxis which practical theology studies has its place within the framework of the coming Kingdom of God. This praxis has the purpose of communicating the liberation which God has initiated and of involving people in this liberating praxis. Heitink (1999a:198-9) classifies some hermeneutical patterns of interpretation – the theme of the kingdom of God, the covenant, the church as the body of Christ, the exodus model. These patterns are indispensable if one is to interpret the current situation in the light of Scripture, and to bridge the gap between the text and the reader (1999a:200).

Strategic perspective

Practical theology has to do with apprehending and getting to know God, appropriating the biblical message and the concomitant religious actions. Apprehending is essentially a communication process. The field of practical theology is to convey the faith, and the actions that mediate it, or to put it differently, to communicate faith through these mediatory actions.

According to Heitink (1999a:202), practical theology as “the theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society” inevitably aims at change, through a process of management and steering. Practical theology as an action science, which as a normative discipline regards this area of mediation and change as its object, combines in itself a hermeneutical interest (to arrive at understanding) with a strategic interest (to facilitate change) (Heitink 1999a:202). This change, according to Heitink (1999a:202-12), focuses on the guidance and change of individuals and on change with regard to social constructs and institutions. The Christian faith works from the presupposition that people can indeed be changed and that our society can be renewed from the eschatological perspective of God’s kingdom.

Empirical perspective

Practical theology has to work deductively in reflecting on the theological basis of its theories. It also has to work deductively to investigate contemporary hermeneutic-communicative praxis in the service of the gospel in church and society. However, the inductive approach is becoming a major operation in this perspective, which is oriented in the paradigm of communicative acts in the service of the gospel.

The empirical analyses of contemporary Christian religious praxis could become an important source for critical and informative knowledge for our practical theological theories as well as a theology of reconstruction (Pieterse & Dreyer 1995:35). Pieterse and Dreyer (1995:35) mention two aspects regarding empirical research, namely the framework within which practical theological empirical research is undertaken and a more detailed conceptualisation of the object of study. They argue that practical theology can contribute empirical knowledge to a theology of reconstruction (1995:34).

The object of practical theology, specifically Christian religious praxis, determines the focus and the boundaries of empirical research in practical theology. Empirical research plays an important, but not a dominant, part in the process of practical theological theorising. Empirical research should be conducted within a theological conceptual framework and the research results must always be interpreted in the light of the

Christian theological tradition (Pieterse & Dreyer 1995:34). If practical theological research is to contribute to a theology of reconstruction, and through this to social transformation, the research must be undertaken within a critical hermeneutical framework. Following Habermas, this framework can be regarded as the result of the combination of empirical, hermeneutical and critical perspectives (1995:36).

In conclusion: Ziebertz (in Pieterse & Dreyer 1995:36) points out the following regarding these three perspectives:

Hermeneutics without a critical perspective can become an ideology; hermeneutics without an empirical perspective may lose touch with reality; the empirical perspective without the hermeneutical perspective can lead to a positivistic understanding of empirical research; the empirical perspective without a critical perspective can lead to an uncritical use, or the misuse, of empirical research results.

Therefore a critical hermeneutical framework could help to reduce the risk of research becoming irrelevant or merely ideological. A critical hermeneutical framework for research has important implications for the methodology of empirical research. It influences the basic epistemological assumptions, the methods of empirical research, the aims of research, the interpretation of the “data,” the application of the “knowledge” that was constructed, etc (Pieterse & Dreyer 1995:36).

1.4.2.4 Three domains of action of practical theology

Practical theology has different fields of action. Heitink (1999b:140) classifies the various subdisciplines into three domains: “human being and religious experience”, “church life and belief”, and “religion and society”. The first domain is anthropological in nature, the second, ecclesiological, and the third, diaconological.

Anthropological Domain

The first domain deals with people as individuals: their way of thinking, believing and self-experience (Heitink 1999a:259-291). Heitink (1999a:269-272; 1999b:140) distinguishes three anthropological fields: poimenics (pastoral care), religious education and spirituality. Heitink (1999a:252) argues that these subdisciplines are supported by a practical-theological anthropology.

Ecclesiological Domain

The second domain concerns social structures, especially the community of the church (Heitink 1999a:274-291). The different aspects of church life are examined. Heitink (1999a:252) argues that these theoretical-theological foundations can be found in a practical-theological ecclesiology, which he develops along the lines of the Koinonia concept. According to Heitink (1999a:285-291; 1999b:140), the ecclesiological field has four fields of action: church development, liturgics, homiletics and catechetics.

Diaconological Domain

The third domain deals with public forms of Christianity and the service of Christians in alleviating social and political problems (Heitink 1999a:292-309). The diaconia of the churches in society deals with this domain, namely the social presence of the actions of the church, its social welfare work (Heitink 1999b:142). The diaconological field consists of three fields of action: mission, diaconate and the involvement of lay people (Heitink 1999a:304-308). According to Heitink (1999a:252), practical-theological diaconology has to do with these subdisciplines.

1.5 METHOD: PROCESS OF RESEARCH

The term “method” refers to the means or procedure by which certain aims and objectives are attained (Van Wyk 1995:85). According to Pieterse (2001a:14-15), in practical theology it is possible to approach research on a specific problem from various angles. He (2001a:14-15) explains several approaches.

Firstly, the existing practical-theological theory about that particular praxis will be examined and analysed conceptually. Then these concepts can be operationalised in a questionnaire, whereupon a survey is carried out and the results analysed statistically. The findings are critically compared with the existing theory of hermeneutic perspective. This could lead to a new practical-theological theory for that specific praxis which would improve the praxis in that particular context.

Secondly, another method is to start with tentative interviews with people working in the specific problem area. From these interviews, it will be possible to compile a semi-structured schedule of questions, which could be used for successive rounds of interviews, until no further information is forthcoming from these sources. From the information obtained, the reality of the situation in that problem area can be identified. These results can then be reflected in theological terms and a theological theory for praxis developed, which might improve the communicative acts in the service of the gospel in that area (preaching, pastoral care, liturgics, youth ministry or measures to deal with some social problem).

This study follows a practical theological methodology – a hermeneutical-mediative approach – suggested by Heitink (1999a) for developing a homiletic theory for the upbuilding of the church. These processes include understanding, explanation, and strategy.

1.5.1 The interpretative perspective

In this phase, this study develops a homiletic theory for building up the church in a transition from a hermeneutic-communicative perspective. The emphasis will be on the development of a homiletic theory from an interpretation of a faithful and relevant identity and its mission for the church and the interpolation of Ricoeur's model of narrative identity into a hermeneutic-communicative framework of homiletic theory. Through this close relationship, in a transition, a homiletic theory for building up the church will be developed (chapter 2).

1.5.2 The explanatory perspective

In this phase, a hypothesis of this study will be explained through empirical research. In order to identify the relationship between a contemporary ecclesiology of the church in Korea and homiletic theories and praxis for church growth, a contemporary ecclesiology of the church in Korea will be described and interpreted. In the course of this analysis of the ecclesiology of the Korean church, some characteristics of this ecclesiology will be identified. This will be followed by an exploration of the relationship between preaching and a contemporary ecclesiology by sermon analysis and homiletic literature on the subject of Korean preaching (chapter 3).

1.5.3 The strategic perspective

Finally, this study will look for a hermeneutic-communicative interaction between the results of the empirical research and the literature study. The result will be new or modified ideas for a faithful and relevant homiletic theory of practice for the upbuilding of the church in Korea. This is a regulative activity that aims to change the current praxis of preaching (chapter 4).

1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Ecclesiology: Ecclesiology is a theological theory of the church. It is the theological expression of the Church's image and varies, consciously, with the varying forms of the real ecclesia (Küng 1968:6). It is expressed in the future-oriented description and explication of the church from the perspective of the gospel. The vision and mission of the church, as well as its tasks and goals, lie within this perspective. Ecclesiology is concerned both about the future of the church and about of the church of the future (Van der Ven 1996:x).

Church growth: Church growth is a movement and has to do with the phenomenon of growing and declining churches under different circumstances and in different cultures. It concerns case studies of churches and congregations involving the social sciences and

aims to study trends in relation to the interaction of social forces that lead to the formation of congregations. The deepest purpose of this movement is to draw men and women who have no relationship with Jesus Christ into a relationship with him, as well as to transform them into responsible church members.

In church growth, sociology and anthropology play a very important role in a pragmatic and functional view of the church. Insights derived from sociology and other disciplines are employed in theology and made to serve the ideals of church growth (Carstens 1997:31-32).

The upbuilding of the church: This is a ministry in which the church constantly reflects on its nature and purpose on the basis of the Bible (Nel 2002). According to Nel (2002), it is a ministry of reformation. It is an act of the triune God who builds up his congregation through his Word, the special offices and the office of the believer who becomes a symbol of his kingdom in the world. Therefore the Word and consequently also the sermon occupy a central place in these events. The theological moment of the upbuilding of the church lies in the fact that attention is devoted to the acts of the triune God. In addition it also has a practical side as the structures of ministry must continually be evaluated and adjusted with a view to the effective functioning of the congregation (Carstens 1997:31-32).

Ecclesial: The choice of the term ecclesial is intended to provoke an image that moves beyond a static, provincial, and bureaucratic image of the church to the New Testament *ekklesia*, which designates a community of people “called forth” (the literal meaning of the Greek) by God to participate in the new creation that has become a historical reality and human possibility in Jesus Christ (Guder et al 1998:153).